Skilled Healthcare

Leading Support-Services Provider to Long-Term Care Facilities Deploys Fast, Reliable WLAN for Residents, Guests, Doctors, and Care Specialists

Requirements

- An enterprise-class wireless network that can be deployed quickly to hundreds of sites.
- Ability to switch networks while keeping costs and training expenses down.
- A wireless network with strong security protocols.
- An online management tool that can quickly configure and manage selected access points.

Results

- A fast, secure, scalable wireless network.
- A reliable network for running programs such as Rehab Optima at all facilities.
- Aerohive's HiveManager Online Network Management Solution provides centralized configuration and monitoring.
- The company will deploy facility-wide Aerohive WLANs at all their skilled-nursing facilities within the next two years.

The Company

Skilled Healthcare, LLC, is a leading support-services provider to the long-term care profession. Through the company's administrative and support services network, it provides direct support to 75 skilled nursing facilities and 22 assisted living facility business affiliates. These locations comprise over 10,700 licensed beds.

The companies in the network are leading regional providers of integrated long-term healthcare services with primary concentrations in urban and suburban markets while also meeting the needs of rural communities. By locating many facilities within a short distance from each other, the company is able to capture the operating synergies among these locations through leveraging infrastructure, employees, and overhead.

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>
> **—Shawn O'Malley**
> Project Manager, Engineering
> Skilled Healthcare

Skilled Healthcare's business affiliates include:

- Skilled Nursing Facilities
- Assisted Living Facilities
- Hallmark Rehabilitation, Inc.
- Hospice Services
- Home Health Services

The Challenge

As with all such diverse healthcare companies, dealing with a combination of aging facilities and increasing wireless demands presents a challenge to enterprise-class wireless networks. That's where Aerohive came in.

Skilled Healthcare had three main reasons for needing an Aerohive wireless network. One is for resident and guest access to the Internet, which is always a plus for the well-being of residents. "More and more often, folks want to Skype with their grandkids, so that's important for them," said Shawn O'Malley, Project Manager, Engineering, for Skilled Healthcare.

The second reason is visiting doctors, so they can be plugged in at all times. "It's a business imperative for those doctors to get wireless access," O'Malley said.

The third, overriding wireless priority, is for staff. The company does a lot with electronic medical records, and most of the devices used at the bedside require wireless connectivity.

Considering the alternatives

Skilled Healthcare began deploying Aerohive APs about a year ago. One of the problems with their existing Cisco deployment was the necessity for multiple controllers. "It wasn't financially appealing to do that," O'Malley said.

Plus, controllers have their own refresh cycle. "When you're looking at spending upwards of $100,000 on controllers at the data center, not to mention how many you need at the facility, it just became cost prohibitive," he said.

In addition, with the Cisco implementation there was a lot of overhead, and it required network engineers to configure the devices.

"So what we were looking for — and at the time I didn't even know if it existed or not — was the controller-less wireless solution," he said.

Once his reseller, Aerohive partner Insight, turned him on to Aerohive, he was hooked. In addition to the elegant APs, he appreciates that he can configure and manage many APs at one time using the HiveManager Online tool.

Deployment

Buildings in the Skilled Healthcare network have, on average, between 15 to 18 access points in them. Fifteen of the company's sites have 100-percent wireless access at the moment. "And we're rolling pretty aggressive at getting the balance of our sites up and running that way," O'Malley said.

All sites in the network have some Aerohive wireless presence, so that they can run new, specialized programs such as Rehab Optima.

The program allows doctors and care specialists to download their patient list for the day, and they can also do point-of-care billing.

"In every building we have at least one hot spot for the rehab department to pull down their data," O'Malley said.

The company is moving fast. The hard-working director of IT set up 200 wireless sites for the company's rehab business unit in three months. "And it was myself doing it," he added.

"We were able to roll those out very quick — we didn't have to rely on our outsource provider. We saved project management fees and consulting fees in doing that. We were challenged to get that done in three months, and we were able to pull that off," he said.

The expectation is that the company will be rolling out facility-wide Aerohive wireless at all their skilled-nursing facilities within the next two years.

Result

"The controller-less solution is ideal," O'Malley said. "We also like the roaming capability between the access points. That's key, and Aerohive has a unique way of doing that without introducing a lot of overhead or communications to controllers on the network."

"Over the years, roaming in general has gotten better, but it seems like Aerohive has really done a great job with allowing seamless roaming between access points," he said.

O'Malley also sang the praises of Aerohive's ease of configuration and ease of use, in addition to the training he received. "The overall administration of it is just easy. You almost don't even have to be an engineer to manage it. And the training Aerohive offers — I just attended one in Long Beach last week — was great," he said.