



Northern Doctors
Case Study



Industry:

Health

Situation

With more than 160,000 calls a year, an increasingly lower budget each year and only 3 administrators, Northern Doctors Urgent Care was under pressure to curb overtime pay and decrease network downtime while continuing to provide an exceptional level of support as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Organization Profile

Northern Doctors Urgent Care is a UK leading out of hours care provider which offers clinical service access to Doctor-led care to 1.2 million patients in England. They provide a range of health and social care services.

Solution

Mobile Admin is a quick and easy solution which is installed on the company's system administrators BlackBerry smartphones to allow them to manage their entire network from anywhere. Mobile Admin also met all the security standards of the NHS, one of the world's largest most secure independent networks.

Results

By implementing Mobile Admin, Northern Doctors Urgent Care has succeeded in lowering their overall costs, including network downtime costs, while increasing in the level of patient care. Northern Doctors Urgent Care has also decreased their Carbon Footprint.

Overview

Every United Kingdom citizen is entitled to receive free medical care by registering with General Practice Doctors (GPs). These General Practitioners work normally Monday to Friday, from 8:30am to 6:00pm. After hours, people in need of their Doctors services may still require swift medical care, though not requiring a visit to and long wait at the Accident and Emergency departments of local hospitals. Many organizations, like Northern Doctors Urgent Care, fill the healthcare gap by providing those vital GP services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Northern Doctors Urgent Care is a UK leading out of hours care provider. It operates a modern call centre hub that offers clinical service access to Doctor-led care to around 1.2 million patients in the North East of England. They provide a range of health and social care services, from mental health services, community nursing, dentistry and a substance abuse action referral team. When the daytime General Practitioners' surgeries close, the patient calls continue to be handled by routing these to Northern Doctors Urgent Care. The staff at the call center gathers details and symptoms of illness from the patients and passes the information on to physicians, who assess the patient by telephone consultation, and decide on a course of action. If warranted, patients will travel to their closest Northern Doctors Urgent Care Centers, or if needed, they can be visited by the mobile Doctor units, who receive the secure patient details via BlackBerry. This means, the most needy patients can be treated without having to leave their homes or suffer until they can visit a Doctor the following day.

IT environment and Personnel

Northern Doctors has 8 locations spanning thousands of square miles and a staff of over 150 call-handling and operational staff working a 24 hour cover system. The staff age ranges from the 18 to 65 and have varying levels of computer experience. They have 400+ doctors in the local area that work with Northern Doctors on a shift basis.

To be able to support all of these people, Northern Doctors Urgent Care owns a complex IT, Telecommunication and mobile data infrastructure running interdependent services that must be available 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. They have 160 work stations, 17 servers, a large Wide Area Network and a telephone system with upwards of 100 extensions. Their entire infrastructure is managed by three full time people who work 7.5 hours a day, 5 days a week, and who also cover an on call Rotation.

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The Challenge

Northern Doctors handles around 160,000 calls a year for all services provided, with 60% of these calls ending up as face-to-face visits. Since September 2004, the number of calls to Northern Doctors Urgent Care has increased by 10%, but the budget has only increased by 1%. With numbers like these, Northern Doctors is constantly re-evaluating costs, while at the same time taking all the necessary steps to provide an exceptional level of support as quickly and efficiently as possible. “In this line of work, to maintain an exceptional level of system uptime, we need exceptional IT support. It is absolutely paramount” said Dan Burrows, IT and Telecommunications manager for Northern Doctors Urgent Care.

Evaluating the Solution

Northern Doctors selected Mobile Admin for its ability to perform a full range of network administration tasks from a wireless handheld device. “Rove Mobile Admin was an instant decision for us. It is not expensive for what it will do for us and the benefits are enormous. It was an easy sell into the organization. We also knew we had to curb our overtime pay and that may have been much harder to achieve in our IT environment without Mobile Admin.”

Administering an Enterprise Solution

Restarting a server, unlocking users or resetting passwords now take seconds, and can be done from anywhere when executed with Mobile Admin. The three member team no longer has to rush back to the office or find a place to dial in. “Until we started using Mobile Admin, covering on call had always been an issue. One of the on-call team always needed to be within range of broadband, laptop, PC, or within driving range to fix problems. Up until recently, we always needed to be close to base, whether at the supermarket, at friends’ or at home so we could fix any problems.”

Now the IT Administrators can respond effectively and quickly to the demands of their jobs, from virtually anywhere. “We are very satisfied with Mobile Admin. The installation was implemented by the experts from Astute. This was a straightforward deployment and we now perform our network management and control from anywhere. On the very first Saturday, 4 days after we deployed the solution, I was in a car on the way to Sheffield and had actually forgotten that I had to cover

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the morning period for one of the guys. While I was 160 miles away from the office, I received a call that a Citrix Server had thrown ALL of the users off their sessions. This would not normally be a problem, because we have a farm of Citrix servers. But, on this occasion, the operations staff required access to a specific service on that specific server. This would have ordinarily ruined my trip, however, with Mobile Admin I was able to diagnose that there weren’t any network issues and that the failed server was in fact connected to the network. In that case, I was very quickly and easily able to restart the server, check that staff were then reconnecting, and continue on the journey”.

“In that one occasion, I became a confirmed believer in the Mobile Admin tool” said Dan. “If I didn’t have Mobile Admin, I would have had no choice but to drive home, go to my laptop, get fired up, dial into work, establish and resolve the issue or even drive in to work and manually restart the server. I could have spent 3 to 4 hours of valuable weekend time to have that server back up. With Mobile Admin, I was able to securely diagnose the issue and then restart the server in less than 20 minutes from a moving vehicle.”

In another instance, Burrows was traveling home, 8 miles from the office, and got a call that a user was unable to access the internet. Without Mobile Admin, he would have to drive back to the office and diagnose the problem. Using Mobile Admin, he was able to establish that there was no issue with the web server, and no issues with services running on that web server. He then called his colleague who had been working on the firewall that day and established that a crucial network adapter was still disabled. Dan was able to walk the staff member through a work-around. That could have been a long process, which was resolved in 15 minutes.”

Quick and significant impact on costs

Every one of the IT problems that arise during the ‘out of hours’ live period could result in a period of downtime. Dan says, “We can cope with 15 to 20 minutes of downtime, but after 30 minutes, it begins to have a very significant impact operationally. Most of the patient care system issues arise between 6pm and 7pm, simply because that is often the time of greatest system load, as all remote bases and mobile units come alive in a short period. Now we can keep pace with these issues using our new Mobile Admin tools, even on our way home from the office, and therefore reduce downtime.”

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Northern Doctors has also been able to curb their overtime costs. “We are easily able to save 3 to 4 hours of work per man per month, upwards of 120 hours a year or 3 to 4 weeks’ work, which is equivalent to a month’s pay for the three of us.”

Faster Response Times

Last year, out of the 160 support calls received in a year, the IT team have estimated that 130 of those calls could have been solved from anywhere in the UK using BlackBerry and Mobile Admin. Dan says “I could chuck my laptop in the bin and just carry Mobile Admin with me. It really is an effective and headlining product. The security of the BlackBerry combined with the quality of the Mobile Admin tool set is just great. As a member of a team that has to provide support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at all hours of the night, it is a life changing product. I am able to solve problems from my bed without even having to get up and fire up the laptop and get connected. From a company perspective, we immediately saw the benefits since we could provide better patient care through higher system availability. But for me and my IT team, we benefit from a better quality of life. We don’t need to be two minutes away from Broadband to respond securely and quickly to network issues.”

Better Level of Patient Care

“The value we get is not just monetary, although there are definite cost savings. One of the biggest impacts is in our ability to provide a better level of care. With Mobile Admin, we can provide a faster and more reliable service, and as a result provide a better service to our patients. That is what we are all about. Trying to make sure our patients endure the least discomfort, least amount of pain, receive the highest level of service, always have access to a doctor in the times they would expect – whilst meeting all Government quality targets. This is where we get the value. Mobile Admin is changing patients’ lives by allowing us to improve their experience.”

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Security

The BlackBerry and Mobile Admin exceeded all the security standards that needed to be met. Northern Doctors’ security standards are governed by the NHS and the standards for the NHS National Network (N3), one of the world’s largest and most secure independent networks, with over 500,000 users.

“The process of getting staff connected to N3 on a laptop, and accessing resources within the network, is long, complicated, full of red tape and expensive”. Dan continues “Sometimes it is even easier and faster to go to the office rather than use my laptop which can be so slow that we can’t be bothered to wait. It is faster to access my network on the BlackBerry.”

The Carbon Footprint

Northern Doctors are always being asked by the government to look at their carbon footprint and consider the environmental aspects of anything they do. BlackBerry and Mobile Admin are helping to reduce the number of mobile car units, and saving in number of car trips. Dan says “Just in my case alone, I have saved a couple of hundred miles in fuel and use of my car. The cost of running my laptop is far higher than the costs of using my BlackBerry.”