

Success Story



Company
Vitodata

Sector
Healthcare

Number of locations
3

Customer since
2007

Services in use
- Business VPN
- Business Internet

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Innovative ASP solution for doctors thanks to high-availability in the network

The networking of all service providers in the healthcare system is a core objective of the national e-health strategy. A digitized information flow benefits patients and reduces administrative costs. One example of this is the collaboration between Vitodata and upc cablecom.

When it comes to our health and wellbeing, any technical innovation is welcome. We are proud of our first-rate medical care and wish to have access to the latest technology in emergencies. Outpatient and inpatient equipment can always be improved upon. Ideal conditions for e-health, or so you would think.

Switzerland is lagging behind

In electronic healthcare services, however, Switzerland is lagging behind by comparison to other countries - despite its excellent technical facilities and organization. This is what prompted the federal government and the cantons, three years ago, to produce a joint strategy document: the E-Health Strategy for Switzerland 2007-2015. According to the Federal Office of Communications, this national strategy is intended to ensure "access to a health service which is affordable, efficient, safe and of high quality". Core elements of the strategy are "firstly, the gradual development of an electronic patient file, and, secondly, a health portal with quality-assured online information that allows patients to access their own files".

IT - a crucial element in first-rate medical care

The implicit message is clear: first-rate medical care starts with the general practitioner, who gathers vital information about the patient. This information should be available at all times, as structured, meaningful and informative data, wherever it is required in the interests of the patient. To make this flow of information possible, those involved must be networked together. Therefore, viewed as a whole, first-rate medical care requires more than equipment and the expertise of specialists. Our medical care can only be first-rate if the information flow is also state of the art.



upc cablecom
business

Vitodata AG

The company Vitodata AG is the Swiss market leader in medical management and documentation systems. Alongside various software products for use in medicine, dentistry and physiotherapy, Vitodata also offers consulting and operating services. This medium-sized family business is managed by its owners. The head office is in Oberrohringen in Winterthur.

Infos: www.vitodata.ch

A glimpse into the future

Some e-health items will be on show to the public at this year's IFAS, the trade fair for the healthcare market. At stand 112 in Hall 7 (Zurich Exhibition Centre, 26-29 October), for example. In six demonstration areas, the medical software specialists Vitodata AG will present us with a glimpse into the near and more long-term future of IT in healthcare. At the forefront will be burning issues such as electronic data interchange (keyword SMEEX), digital medical records and the health insurance card.

The Swiss software company, which has been in existence for 30 years, produces, implements and operates IT solutions for medical practices and hospitals. Around 4,400 customers currently use vitomed practice software, bringing Vitodata's market share to around 40 per cent. This medium-sized business, which employs 109 staff at sites in Oberrohringen (head office) and Biel, sees itself as a general contractor. Its central Engineering department is part of its Consulting and Operating division.

Historic landscapes

One of the major challenges for a software manufacturer in the healthcare sector is the heterogeneity of IT environments. Not only does each medical practice have a plethora of devices from various manufacturers, it also has its own particular configuration. All manner of devices are connected to the PC: lung function devices, ECG equipment, laboratory equipment, x-ray machines, scanners and printers. Vitodata has now programmed 420 interfaces for its software - an industry record. What makes it more difficult is the fact that many practices are working with obsolete hardware and software. Vitodata detects a similarly pressing need for action in life-cycle management. What use is having the best application, if the hardware has seen better days?

Full IT service instead of selling licences

To help alleviate this problem, Vitodata positioned itself as an application service provider (ASP) as long as five years ago. This operating model has various advantages:

- the doctor no longer has to worry about data security and software updates.
 - patient data is stored centrally and can be accessed more easily by doctors, for example where practices have joined forces to provide emergency cover.
 - central operation makes the software easier to control and maintain.
 - with full cost consideration, the ASP model is 10 to 25 per cent cheaper.
- However, Vitodata's Citrix-based ASP solution has some limitations: the thin clients can only handle a proportion of the IT tasks in the practices, since the peripheral devices use local computer capacity. Vitodata nevertheless attributes high strategic importance to the ASP model. At present, 350 stations are running with rental software via the internet. The potential is enormous: just the existing customers alone are working on 12,000 workstations. The functional range of the ASP software is now to be gradually expanded.

The secret is providing redundancy

A central aspect of the ASP model is availability. If the computer centre or the data line breaks down, everything at the medical centre comes to a halt. To achieve maximum data availability, redundancy solutions are needed on all levels: connections, networks, processors, memories. Vitodata has made appropriate provision for this. The computer centre in the Oberrohringen industrial district is connected to a second data storage facility in the vicinity. The computer centre data is replicated there hourly and backed up every two and a half days. Since the data is transferred from the doctor to the computer centre via a secure internet connection, this internet connection also had to be duplicated.

Carrier required

The distribution of software via the internet - which is the norm in the licensing business today - firstly demanded a high bandwidth. Secondly, the solution also needed to guarantee a maximum availability for the ASP business. In specific terms, the data would still have to be available if one or more of the following events were to occur:





From left: René Zwahlen, Systems Engineer, and Patrick Schiess, Team Manager, Computer Centre, ensure that the computer centre at Vitodata in Oberrohringen runs without a hitch.

- optical fibre cable in the access network is damaged.
- service platform in the carrier's core network breaks down
- carrier is disconnected from the internet.

As a consequence of this, firstly the premises needed to be connected on two sides to optical fibre lines, which lead to the carrier's core network via separate routes. Secondly, if service is interrupted in the core network, data traffic is to be automatically routed via an alternative service platform. And, thirdly, a managed BGB solution is to be used for controlling the internet traffic autonomously via two providers.

upc cablecom solution is clearly superior

The dual-access, dual-platform and dual-provider concept does indeed bring the desired availability to the ASP operation - but can a medium-sized business such as Vitodata afford it? Comparison of the offers led to a surprising result: the solution proposed by upc cablecom business was impressive, and not only from the technical perspective. It was also the only offer that was affordable. After a short construction period the new internet connection was started up at the head office on 29 July 2010. The current band-

width is 100 Mbit/s. Primary resources are the MPLS backbone and internet feed from upc cablecom. The upc cablecom SDH backbone and the internet feed from Interoute operate as the fallback solution. The close collaboration between upc cablecom and Interoute has a further critical advantage for Vitodata: even though two carriers are involved, Vitodata has only one contact person and receives only one invoice.

Another stroke of luck for Vitodata customers

The remaining weak point is the internet connection to the customer, which should also be duplicated if possible. Here, too, cooperation with upc cablecom proves fortuitous. upc cablecom business currently not only supplies medical practices with the fastest internet connections, including installation, fixed IP addresses and professional business support. It also offers value-for-money redundancy options for ASP solutions. The Business Internet Fiber Power Services are already available throughout Switzerland, starting from 78 francs per month (ex. VAT). With this unbeatable offer behind them, Vitodata is now able to offer a comprehensive, top-quality service. All that is needed now is for doctors to have slightly more courage to innovate.

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