Increasing Field Service Productivity for Beckman Coulter

Beckman Coulter, Inc. is a leading manufacturer of biomedical testing instrument systems, tests and supplies that simplify and automate laboratory processes. Spanning the biomedical testing continuum – from pioneering medical research and clinical trials to laboratory diagnostics and point-of-care testing – Beckman Coulter's 200,000 installed systems provide essential biomedical information to improve patient health and reduce the cost of care.

OBJECTIVE

Beckman Coulter's goal was to increase the productivity of their field service engineers by giving them access to customer information while working remotely in hospital labs, biotech facilities, university research centers or wherever their work took them. Equipped with handheld pocket PCs running Windows Mobile 5, field service engineers connected to their corporate offices to gather information needed to install, provide maintenance or repair any of Beckman Coulter's manufactured instrumentation.

CHALLENGES

Jeff Silveira, Project Lead for Mobile Field Applications, had already scoped out many of the challenges they would face. "We had anticipated coverage issues," Silveira explained, "that would require our field workers to login manually throughout the day when they lost their wireless connection. This could reduce their productivity and we were looking for a solution to solve this."

Security was an equally tantamount concern for Silveira. "I knew that we needed a VPN solution," Silveira adds, "and it needed to be a solution designed for wireless." Beckman Coulter's mobile workforce would be using a variety of networks from Wi-Fi to any number of cellular data networks. They needed to ensure that customer information was always secure for their deployment to move forward.

"We were also looking for something simple," Silveira concludes, "this is all new technology for our workers. They already have to learn how to use applications on PDAs, such as Intellisynch for push email and ActiveSynch , so what we needed was something easy. I was looking for something that would let our mobile workers stay connected to the information they needed to be productive in the field."

SOLUTION

"We did a search for mobile VPNs and brought in the strongest candidates," explains Silveira. "The product that seemed to best meet our needs and expectations was NetMotion Wireless' Mobility XE solution. From my perspective the setup was simple and it's straightforward to understand. Now when workers in the field have connectivity issues the first thing I ask is whether the Mobility icon is showing connected." Although field workers may lose connectivity from time to time due to coverage gaps in cellular data service, Mobility XE is able to persist their connections to applications. When they move back into coverage, the applications pick-up exactly where they left off with no lost time required to log back in or restart applications.

Mobility XE was able to smooth over many of the technical challenges in the wireless deployment. Silveira adds, "NetMotion saved us a bit as we were concerned we'd have to pull devices back when networking issues came up. Mobility was able to insulate us from many of the problems that occur in wireless computing."

Industry
Enterprise

Challenges
- Field service and corporate applications not designed to work on wireless networks with intermittent coverage (cellular data)
- Workers had to re-login and re-enter data due to application crashes when devices lost network connectivity
- Corporate data and applications needed to be secured for ensure protection from unauthorized access

Solution
- Mobility XE VPN solution

Results
- Mobility XE VPN kept application sessions alive through wireless coverage gaps
- Workers no longer had to re-login or re-key data as Mobility XE insulated them from dropped connections
- Beckman Coulter instrument maintenance and repairs were completed in one visit as opposed to multiple return trips

Beckman Coulter has also seen productivity enhancements from Mobility XE. Currently, engineers are able to easily share image files with their technical support and specialists teams and diagnose equipment issues on-the-fly. "We've been able to reduce or in some cases eliminate the need for additional service calls to a customer's location," comments Silveira. "Some of our engineers have been able to give guidance via phone to resolve problems without having to get on an airplane and travel to a customer's site. This saves time and money and increases the productivity of our field service engineers."

NEXT STEPS

The success that Beckman Coulter has seen in terms of productivity enhancements together with high user acceptance is allowing them to move forward with plans to deploy mobile devices broadly to field service engineers both in the US and internationally. Soon they'll also begin a rollout of the Oracle Mobile application to handheld users giving field service engineers even more information at their fingertips. Mobility XE will maintain a persistent connection to Oracle Mobile as users move across different wireless networks and in and out of coverage – giving them a seamless use experience. Their current deployment of more than 1,000 Mobility XE equipped PDAs is expected to grow as additional international users are added.

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-- Jeff Silveira,
Project Lead,
Mobile Field Applications,
Beckman Coulter

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