



► Mission: Possible

Emtec helps Cumberland County social services agency improve efficiency with network integration project.

The Cumberland County Board of Social Services (CCBOSS) has a noble mission- to manage and administer a host of assistance programs for the area's homeless, unemployed and medically needy population. A recent network implementation and integration project facilitated by Emtec, Inc. has given the board the tools it needs to accomplish that mission.

With Emtec's assistance, CCBOSS has become one of the first county welfare agencies in New Jersey to achieve full network integration with the Department of Human Services (DHS). Emtec engineers designed, configured and implemented a new network design, which involved the migration of approximately 250 users from a workgroup environment to a Windows 2003 Active Directory domain environment.

That project has created enormous benefits for Cumberland County, according to Ryan Granato, Data Processing and Programming Technician for CCBOSS. The new network addresses the board's current technology needs, establishes a baseline for future growth, and helps ensure compliance with HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) regulations for security, privacy and transactions.

"HIPAA compliance is a big deal for us," said Granato. "The new system also allows us to make a lot more information available to our workers. Our agency utilizes DHS programs, and depending on which programs our clients are eligible for, there may be a lot of forms to fill out. With the new system we have these forms online and at the fingertips of our workers."

"Plus, the new system is much faster. It dramatically reduces the time it takes our workers to access the Internet, the state servers and even our own in-house databases."

Building for the Future:

CCBOSS is among 21 county welfare agencies that administer DHS programs locally. They work closely with DHS to provide referral, counseling and intervention services to families, children, the elderly, troubled adolescents, victims of domestic violence, veterans and persons with disabilities.

Typically, however, the county agencies do not run their own local networks. Since the late 1980s the state has run a central computer system to which all county welfare agencies have access through a peer-to-peer network. Cumberland County services were administered through offices in Vineland, Millville and Bridgeton- all of which had loosely affiliated workgroups of users who accessed the state servers through their PCs.

When CCBOSS recently decided to consolidate the Vineland and Millville offices at a new building in Vineland, it provided an opportunity to re-evaluate the board's computing infrastructure. It became apparent that a local network would improve both efficiency and security.

"We knew we were going to need a new server because the one we had been running on was just too slow and too small to handle what we wanted to do in the future," said Granato. "We started looking at equipment and talking to people at the state level to see what we would need to do to put this together and still be on their network."

Experience Counts:

Granato and Greg Curliss, Director of CCBOSS, quickly identified Emtec as their preferred technology partner. As a contract vendor for the state of New Jersey, Emtec has worked with DHS and a variety of other state, county and local agencies on past IT-related projects.

"I knew other state agencies had dealt with Emtec quite a bit," said Granato. "so I got in contact with them to get the ball rolling."

After the initial consultation, Emtec's Account Manager Sal Baglio, and Project Manager Kevin Rider, recognized immediately that they would have to work closely with DHS to implement a local network while maintaining access to the state's central computing system. From Emtec's past experience working with DHS, they knew the state agency enforced strict security measures to restrict access to its systems and applications.

"DHS has strong security requirements, so it was important that we did a technical review and validated for DHS that we could integrate these networks in a way that gave the local agency what they needed while also meeting the DHS requirements."

"We were able to serve as a facilitator between DHS and Cumberland County, and I'm not sure any other partner could have done that," said Baglio. "We've done so much work — beyond just the technology — that we've learned how these agencies operate and how they interoperate. That knowledge comes from 20 years of experience working with state, county and local government."

Local A Control:

key issue was providing the county agency with its own domain including separate directories for system resources such as user desktop profiles, applications, file printers and security information. Emtec recommended a Microsoft Windows 2003 network with Active Directory.

Designed especially for distributed networking environments, Active Directory gives administrators a single point of access and a unified database for all system resources as well as strengthened security with a single sign-on to network resources. This makes it possible for the county agency and DHS to securely and efficiently share information about network resources. Active Directory also supports the Windows 2003 security model, preventing unauthorized access and providing tools that let administrators apply specific security levels to groups of users.

Emtec installed two (2) Dell PowerEdge servers to run the network. One was configured as a domain controller, which serves as a central repository for passwords. When a user logs on to a desktop PC, it consults the domain controller to verify the password. The other server is a file and print server and performs backup. In addition, Emtec installed a Dell Power-Vault tape drive and Veritas Backup Exec software to manage the devices and schedule backup jobs.

"Most of the county agencies run off the state's servers, but the Cumberland County Board of Social Services now has its own local server," said Frank Schray, an Emtec Senior Systems Engineer. "All of their logins and all their policies are now being run locally, which gives them more control over what their users have available to them."

Granato said he plans to eventually connect the Bridgeton office to their main office in Vineland to further extend the benefits of the new network. He said he wouldn't hesitate to use Emtec again.

"All in all, this project went very smoothly," he said. "I'm really happy about it. This was such a new experience for us all, and Emtec's ability to establish communication between us and the state was very important. That's where their expertise with government projects really showed."

About Emtec: Established in 1964, Emtec, Inc. is a systems integrator that provides IT services and products to the federal, state, local, education and commercial markets. Our market leading value-based management methods, coupled with best-in-class IT technology, consulting and development services, address a wide range of specific client needs, as well as support broader IT transformation initiatives. Emtec's service capabilities span the United States, Canada and countries around the globe.