

South African National Blood Service

Citrix Application Delivery
for Healthcare

“ We have revolutionized our infrastructure while cutting support calls by more than a third. Overall, the Citrix solution has been a huge success.”

Amit Singh
IT Services Team Leader,
South African National
Blood Service

Key benefits

- Reduced cost and effort of IT administration and support
- Improved delivery of applications to remote sites
- Avoided cost of expanding WAN bandwidth
- Improved security of data, with no need to back up locally

South African National Blood Service makes application delivery its lifeblood

The South African National Blood Service (SANBS) is an association of voluntary, non-remunerated blood donors. Its goal is to provide patients with sufficient safe, high-quality blood products and medical services related to blood transfusion in an equitable, cost-effective manner.

With the overriding mission to be acknowledged nationally and internationally as a center of excellence in the discipline of blood transfusion, SANBS works closely with the South African Department of Health and is overseen by a national board of directors consisting mainly of blood donors. There are almost 2,000 employees in the organization.

The Challenge: Supporting the supporters across multiple sites

SANBS works in cities and rural locations across the country. Its 160 offices, clinics and blood banks are spread as far as Springbok in the Northern Cape, to Port Elizabeth and East London in the Eastern Cape, to the head offices in Durban and Johannesburg. In addition, there are almost 100 mobile blood collection units out on the road at any one time.

A mixture of head office users and clinic staff meant that there were problems ensuring a consistent level of IT support while providing up-to-date applications to all users in the network. Applications such as MEDITECH's Blood Bank, which integrates donor and patient history with data from the national healthcare system, are a key part of SANBS' lifesaving work — but hardware and software problems could sometimes prevent health workers from accessing or updating this critical system.

Workers also use Microsoft® Excel spreadsheets or Word documents, often saved locally on PC hard drives, to hold operational or financial information that wouldn't necessarily be entered into the SAP financial management system. If there was a problem with the local PC, that vital data could be irretrievably lost.

To compound the issue, blood banks and clinics are scattered throughout the provinces — sometimes in extremely rural locations — so issues with IT could result in average journey times of four to eight hours for the support teams. This figure could rise to 20 hours if on-site support was needed at the Springbok branch. Workers at SANBS clinics often needed to receive remote support over a Wide Area Network (WAN), creating bandwidth issues and often making effective remote support impossible.

“In extreme cases the distributed nature of our offices meant we would be flying across the country to address minor hardware issues with a PC,” said Amit Singh, IT Services team leader at SANBS. “We needed to find a solution that would take the pressure off the support team while improving the way we used our network to give us the most efficient result.”

Implementing a Citrix Application Delivery Infrastructure solution

Singh and his team looked into solutions to improve the sharing of information and software uptime across the organization while reducing the drain on support services. SANBS tested various solutions from several vendors, but browser-based solutions were found to use too much bandwidth to fulfill the needs of the organisation effectively.

“Any technology that was bandwidth-intensive meant we would have had to update our WAN at additional cost, and in some cases this just wasn’t workable when attempting to deliver applications to our branch offices,” Singh said. “We needed technology that would work over our existing WAN and hardware, while bringing us the benefits of allowing all our information to be centrally managed and stored.”

SANBS worked with **Smart Axess Solutions**, a Gold Citrix® Solution Advisor, to design, implement and support a solution that would fit its needs. Citrix Presentation Server™ offered secure application delivery to remote sites without being bandwidth-hungry, and simplified support across the entire network, according to Singh.

“With Citrix we are able to deliver applications across our network of offices using just 8 to 12 Kbps per session, and all our data is centrally managed and backed up, without the need for local users to back up all their data themselves,” he said. “We were able to simplify the entire process, while giving users a consistently high level of remote support and access to all the same information — than they had before the switchover — and in some cases far more.”

Operations standardized as technology goes nationwide

By centrally delivering applications as varied as its SAP financials and the MEDITECH system with Presentation Server, SANBS has been able to reduce the extent and cost of on-site support while improving the efficiency of the organization. Using Presentation

About the Citrix Solution

Citrix Presentation Server™ is the de facto standard for delivering Windows® applications at the lowest cost—to any user, anywhere. It offers both application virtualization and application streaming delivery methods to enable the best access experience for any user, with any device, working over any network. By centralizing applications and data in secure datacenters, IT can reduce costs of management and support, increase data security, and facilitate business continuity. Presentation Server allows IT to deliver applications as a service—providing on-demand access to users, while affording IT the flexibility to leverage future application architectures.

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Server, the team also extended the use of MEDITECH across the entire national network of clinics, creating a more robust and interconnected operational structure.

About 600 employees use Citrix Presentation Server, and up to 400 connect at any one time. Thanks to the fact that all data and applications are stored, administered and delivered centrally, SANBS has been able to expand and adapt to new challenges and requirements. Users are able to access their own information without the worry of a hardware issue causing data loss, while the extension of MEDITECH means everyone is working from the same information.

As a result, SANBS’ funding can be spent on lifesaving work, and not on troubleshooting IT issues, according to Singh.

“Thanks to the reduction in complexity of the infrastructure and the ability to deliver and remotely support applications using Citrix Presentation Server, we have seen not only a drop in support calls to the helpdesk of more than 30 percent but also the creation of a far more flexible organization,” he said. “The administration of the network is much easier, and we’ve observed a reduction in the bandwidth required to continue running at optimum efficiency.”

Singh added: “We’re also able to bring new clinics online far more easily, as the infrastructure enables a far simpler and quicker setup. Overall, the Citrix solution has been a huge success.”

Networking environment

- Citrix Presentation Server™ running on IBM x346 and x3550 servers
- Microsoft® Windows Server® 2003
- HP Compaq T5510, T5520 and T5530 thin clients
- WAN

Applications delivered

- SAP financials
- Microsoft® Office
- MEDITECH Blood Bank

