

Now powering the e-health revolution: your cable company

In the new health care environment, providers enjoy benefits from working with companies that own and operate their own networks.

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In today's connected health environment, the cable industry is emerging as a new sort of critical care provider with a special skill: full control of network functionality and service delivery. One key reason is that cable companies own and maintain their own data networks, providing assurance that traffic flows can be isolated and maintained as discreet paths.

In health care, that's especially critical as health care organizations seek to manage security and privacy considerations that have heightened in importance as a result of federal HIPAA and HITECH requirements.

In San Antonio, for example, Time Warner Cable Business Class [provides an Ethernet Private LAN](#) that connects San Antonio Kidney Disease Center's 13 remote clinics to the organization's headquarters. Delivering symmetrical data rates of up to 100 Mbps, the dedicated Ethernet connection provides the security this 30-physician nephrology practice demands. "Nobody else's data touches our network; our data doesn't touch anybody else's network," said the group's IT Director.

As the San Antonio example illustrates, Ethernet stands out as a key healthcare resource provided by cable companies. Healthcare organizations increasingly are turning to cable Ethernet connectivity to replace aging and expensive T-1 lines.

In Southern New Jersey earlier this year, Cooper University Health Care replaced a patchwork of T-1 circuits and other data network elements with a [comprehensive, private Ethernet network](#) from Comcast. Components include a fiber-based Ethernet Network Service with 86 connections that link 43 locations at up to 600 Mbps; 200 Mbps Ethernet Dedicated Internet line at Cooper University Hospital for Internet access; 1 Gbps Ethernet Virtual Private Line at a main campus in Camden; and Ethernet @Home service to radiologists' homes, providing 6 Mbps Ethernet Virtual Private Line connections for secure, private access to the Cooper network.



The Cooper University implementation illustrates how cable companies are solving a myriad of demands for healthcare technology organizations with one-stop solutions. As the transition to electronic health records and digital imaging hastens, these customized approaches are essential. "Patients do not want to go to a doctor's office and be told they can't be seen because the computer system is down, so the network plays a crucial role in healthcare IT in ensuring clinicians always have access to EMRs, imaging and other patient information when and where needed,"

said Jayashree Raman, Vice President and Chief Information Officer for Cooper University Health Care. "Our Comcast Ethernet services enable us to deliver a reliable network infrastructure to our doctors, nurses and staff, which let them focus on their patients and providing the critical medical care that the local community has come to expect from us."

Cable's deep dive into Ethernet connectivity is making a big impact. Cable companies have gone from newcomers on the Ethernet scene to significant players in just a few years. Three cable companies now [rank among the top 10 U.S. business Ethernet providers](#), according to industry analyst Vertical Systems

Group, and Comcast is the fastest-growing provider among the entire category. “Cable companies have developed a winning formula for the U.S. business Ethernet market,” said Rick Malone, Principal at Vertical Systems Group. “They are successfully leveraging their on-net fiber footprints to offer aggressive pricing and rapid service provisioning.”

Patient amenities



Even though Ethernet and private data networks are critical components of the new, data-intensive healthcare environment; they’re hardly alone on the healthcare telecommunications stage. A renewed emphasis on patient and family comfort also has spurred significant upgrades to amenities across the healthcare spectrum. Advanced video entertainment and wireless Internet services are among the most common areas of focus, and cable companies are helping to deploy them across the healthcare ecosystem.

One example: In western Tennessee, the business arm of Charter Communications, Spectrum Business, provides wireless Internet access and video entertainment in patient waiting rooms and rehab facilities of [McKenzie Medical Center](#), a physician-owned practice that treats 650 patients daily. “It’s the little things that matter,” said McKenzie’s IT Director. “Being able to provide those little things lets our patients know we care about their experience.”

Making these types of amenities easier for healthcare providers to choose and implement means providing services across boundaries – something cable companies uniquely are suited to accomplish and CIOs are prone to appreciate. When Spectrum Business division began working to implement fiber and Ethernet connectivity for multiple locations of the Missouri healthcare organization COMTREA, it became apparent that Spectrum Business also could solve a separate need: providing advanced video and videoconferencing services across patient rooms, waiting rooms and internal offices. That meant not only a package discount, but a one-stop solution from a single, locally responsive provider.

“Thanks to the bundle pricing of Internet and TV, the pricing was good,” commented COMTREA’s Executive Vice President of Operations in a [published case study](#). “In the final decision it came down to price and service. Spectrum Business came out on top in both areas.”

Cable companies, which lead the U.S. in delivery of residential video and high-speed Internet connectivity, have translated these skill sets adroitly to the healthcare environment, with dedicated products and service teams for the category. Time Warner Cable’s HD Video for Healthcare platform, which makes home-like television entertainment services available to patients in a scalable manner, is one high-profile example of this movement.

Cable’s inroads into the enterprise segment of the healthcare sector are impressive. But the industry remains firmly steeped in a longstanding tradition of one-to-one service even for the smallest participants. In St. Petersburg, Fla., the Medical Director for rehab specialist Orthopedic Injury Management credits the local cable company [Bright House Networks](#) for bringing order and stability to what had been a chaotic jumble of separate phone, Internet and IT service providers. Now, with all three service categories managed by one team, he says, “We got exactly what we wanted, where we wanted, and now we have people who can monitor it for us all the time.” Now that sounds like a prescription for healthy communications.

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