



Southern Cross Unlocks Developer Creativity With Azure Virtual Desktop

Background

Founded in 1961, Southern Cross Healthcare Group is a not-for-profit group of businesses focused on New Zealanders' health. The member-owned society group includes New Zealand's largest health insurance provider Southern Cross Health Insurance, which makes up 62% of the market and has an S&P financial rating of A+. The group also includes Southern Cross Hospitals as well as other insurance businesses.



Any new technology has a settling in period, however knowing that the service is meeting the expectations of the end users and supporting teams is a great outcome.

Damon Cowley, head of information, Security and Risk Management, Southern Cross Healthcare Group

Challenge

Southern Cross's team of over 70 software development professionals were finding corporate IT and security standards too restrictive, limiting their ability to work creatively and do what they needed to deliver creative business outcomes.

There was a growing divide between the Security Team and Development Teams with comments like "security is blocking my work" and "developers don't understand the risk of ransomware".

At the same time, Southern Cross had an aging fleet of laptop and desktop computers, was moving to flexible desk arrangements and had developers who needed access to costly high specification machines.

There was a need to decouple the software development environment from the corporate environment to provide greater developer flexibility and creativity while also maintaining business and security risk standards.

Work

Southern Cross made the decision to move the software development teams onto Azure Virtual Desktop (AVD). AVD places peoples' Windows desktop, applications and data all in the cloud, enabling them to work on their Windows desktop securely from anywhere, on any device. Southern Cross worked with Microsoft Gold Partner Equinox IT to implement AVD.

With Equinox IT's help, Southern Cross ran a complex discovery exercise to understand the needs and manage expectations across a range of stakeholder groups, including the Security Team and Software Development Teams. A comprehensive AVD solution was architected to meet the diverse stakeholder needs.

The solution involved deploying AVD across all of the software development teams. Supporting this solution, the team configure Azure Firewall to manage security, set-up scripts to automate deployment in AVD, installed FSLogix for user profiles and used Intune to manage corporate software.

The result was over 200 secure connections within AVD across on-premises, Azure, AWS and Azure DevOps infrastructure and services.

The work was carried out during the difficult time of New Zealand's initial COVID-19 lockdown, which increased delivery expectations to meet the organisation's rapidly changing remote working needs.

AVD is a new Microsoft cloud service which brings its own complexities and coupled with this Southern Cross's implementation was one of New Zealand's first and certainly the most complex deployment to date.

Outcome

AVD is still settling in at Southern Cross, but already the team has realised a number of benefits to help position them for continued health industry leadership:

- Development teams have moved to activity-based work, flexibly delivering from anywhere with freedom to develop creative business solutions.
- The corporate environment is now completely separate from the development environment and has a consistent level of security to mitigate risks and protect member data.
- The AVD developer environment is highly secure, meeting the Security Team's expectations while allowing development teams to do what they need.
- Cost effective, fast and convenient provisioning and maintenance of developer desktop environments which can now be done remotely from the developer's device.
- Developer compute power is decoupled from their physical device, allowing cost savings on device specifications and ability to rapidly scale up and scale down compute power based on need, paying only for what is required.
- Easy to use, with development teams finding AVD a seamless experience, consistent with the local device experience.

Microsoft Gold Partner Equinox IT helped Southern Cross assess, architect, implement and secure the AVD software development environment.



Equinox IT provided a collaborative team approach to solutioning the new developer environment. Regular check-ins and updates helped to keep the momentum, as well as the establishment of user champions to really prove the solution was fit for purpose.

Damon Cowley, head of information, Security and Risk Management, Southern Cross Healthcare Group

Get in touch

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