

Stride Rite Finds the Perfect Fit with Managed VPN Solutions from iPass®

Leading children's shoe retailer securely connects 350 U.S.-based stores with iPass Retail Office and Wireless Primary Services

The Challenge: Implement a secure, fully managed site-to-site IPSec VPN service using Internet broadband connectivity to meet PCI compliance, provide seamless connectivity and control WAN expenses

The Solution: iPass Retail Office and Wireless Primary Services

The Result: Faster POS transactions, improved customer service, better business management and new intranet capabilities

stride rite

For more than 85 years, Stride Rite has been designing and selling affordable footwear that stands up to the rough-and-tumble ways of active kids. The company maintains several factories in China, two distribution centers in the U.S. and one in Europe, and 350 stores across the U.S.

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LIZ NAPIER
Manager of Retail Store Systems, Stride Rite

THE CHALLENGE

Like many retailers, Stride Rite had long relied on dial-up access to connect its store-based Point of Sale (POS) systems to banks for credit card authorizations and headquarters for nightly sales polling. However, because of the inability to simultaneously share a dial-up line, no additional business processes were enabled, such as inventory lookup or customer account access. The dial-up lines had to remain clear for credit card transactions.

In 2004, the company began looking for a managed solution provider. "We wanted to create a managed, always-on network that was secure, reliable and cost-effective," said Liz Napier, Manager of Retail Store Systems at Stride Rite. "We wanted to work with a provider that could sense when a portion of the network was down, open a trouble ticket and have someone working it before we even knew about the issue."

After investigating several vendors and conducting numerous ROI analyses, Stride Rite managers chose iPass. "iPass was the best company by far in our RFP process—price wise, security wise and coverage wise," touted Napier.

THE SOLUTION

Due to budget concerns at the time, Stride Rite was forced to postpone. However, in 2006, the company resumed the project, conducted a two-month certification program and then began a controlled rollout to all 350 of its stores with the help of a dedicated iPass project manager. "Having a dedicated project manager and regular meetings was invaluable to the rollout's success," explained Napier. "For example, we had a lot of dial-up lines that were previously connected to modems. We needed to 'win back' those lines for DSL coverage in our stores. Our iPass project manager jumped right in and helped facilitate the process. It was a monumental task—one I was happy to delegate."

With the necessary phone lines secured, iPass started provisioning service to the stores in mid 2006 and had most of them up and running by the end of 2007. The bulk of the stores received DSL access. A small number were provisioned with cable when it was available. Sixteen stores could only get T1 lines. "At \$800 per month per store, it was cost prohibitive to run T1 to all 16 stores,"





commented Napier. "iPass suggested we look into its Wireless Primary Service. In the first half of 2008, we piloted Wireless Primary Service and then implemented it in 13 of those 16 stores. This 3G service is faster than dial-up, very reliable and much more cost-effective than T1."

Now in 2008, Stride Rite managers have the secure, fully managed site-to-site IPSec VPN service they wanted combined with the benefits of full compliance with the Payment Card Industry (PCI) Data Security Standard. According to Napier, "To be PCI compliant, there are an overwhelming number of rules regarding service monitoring, exception handling, quarterly reporting and other tasks. If we had to do it ourselves, it would've taken a large dedicated team at Stride Rite. But iPass takes care of everything PCI-related for us."

Like all iPass retail customers, Stride Rite has access to the iPass Managed Network Services Portal. This provides a dashboard display of all the company's store connectivity. At a glance, managers can see which stores are fully operational, which are on backup and if any are down. What's more, they can drill down on any individual store to review the historical network status, look up their IP address and more.

THE RESULTS

Since implementing the iPass solution, Stride Rite has seen significant improvements in customer satisfaction:

Faster credit card authorizations— down from approximately one minute to one second— are a big convenience to customers.

Real-time look up of customer history from any store saves time and eliminates hassles. Once a customer is entered into the system, the information is immediately available to all Stride Rite stores.

Centralized validation of returns allows customers to return an item at any store. Highly convenient to customers, this ability also bolsters Stride Rite's loss prevention methods.

Online inventory lets associates look up stock on hand at other stores if a particular shoe style or size isn't available at their store, ensuring customers' needs are met.

iPass Retail Office also helps Stride Rite better manage its business:

Accelerated POS polling times— some 50 percent faster.

Centralized POS management saves time and resources while improving system functionality and security. IT staff at headquarters can now quickly deploy application patches to update POS systems at all stores.

Improved annual inventory is an enormous time saver. With 95 percent broadband uptime companywide, store managers now validate UPCs with headquarters in real time, saving hours of work correcting invalid UPCs.

New intranet capabilities include improved payroll features, operations manual accessibility, customer and employee special ordering, and intra-store communications.

Going forward, Stride Rite is contemplating offering associate self-help HR functionality, online training, state-specific employment forms, office-supply ordering and even Internet-based music to its stores through the iPass-enabled network.

ABOUT IPASS

iPass helps enterprises unify the management of remote and mobile connectivity and devices. With iPass software and services, customers can create easy-to-use broadband solutions for their mobile workers, home offices, and branch and retail locations, complete with device management, security validation, and unified billing. iPass offerings are powered by its leading global virtual network, on-demand management platform, and award-winning client software. Hundreds of Global 2000 companies rely on iPass services, including General Motors, Nokia, and Reuters. Founded in 1996, iPass is headquartered in Redwood Shores, Calif., with offices throughout North America, Europe and Asia. ■

Corporate Headquarters
iPass Inc.
3800 Bridge Parkway
Redwood Shores, CA 94065

+1 650-232-4100
+1 650-232-4111 fx
www.ipass.com

