



West Virginia University Hospitals

Getting results



When West Virginia University Hospitals' clinical lab made the transition from dumb terminals to PCs, it required host compatibility for access to legacy systems — mainly the Sunquest clinical information system for management of laboratory data functions.

Background

SmarTerm was recommended by a third party, and Ray Murray, Laboratory Information Services Supervisor for West Virginia University Hospitals, started with the SmarTerm 420 product in 1995. Murray subsequently upgraded to SmarTerm Essential after his account representative informed him of a special upgrade offer for SmarTerm 420 users.

"I really appreciate the upgrade discount that we received," said Murray. "In fact, that was what prompted my move to upgrade. The price was very competitive, and it certainly helped me get the purchase approved by our administration. Now we're using the current version, and it's all gone very smoothly. I haven't even had to consult the manual."

Murray's responsibilities include management of lab computer systems for West Virginia University Hospitals' trauma center (approximately 385 beds). The lab computing environment includes an IBM RS/6000 host on a LAN, running the AIX operating system. End-users range from doctors and nurses to lab technicians and other staff.

Challenges

A primary reason for moving from terminals to PCs was the need to give users multi-tasking capabilities for higher productivity. With terminals, "If a user needed to perform a different task, they would have to go physically to another machine," Murray recalled. In addition, he and his staff needed the capability to capture charge codes, billing information, and other lab data from the Sunquest system for import to applications such as Excel and Access.

Although SmarTerm also connects the lab to a hospital registration system and a materials management system, it is primarily used as a solution for access to the Sunquest clinical information system. "Here in the clinical lab, SmarTerm is our sole connectivity solution for Sunquest," said Murray.

Solutions and benefits

With SmarTerm, end-users get the multi-session/multi-tasking productivity capability they need. And the lab saw an immediate return on investment through a decrease in the number of workstations required. "Now I can have one PC running three or four Sunquest sessions, whereas before, with dumb terminals it was only one user on one machine," Murray said. "Users can just start a new session and then tab back into their other session."

On the management side, Murray relies on SmarTerm's data-capture features. "We can download reports directly from Sunquest to our PCs for import into a spreadsheet or as simple text files," he explained. "That capability has been a tremendous help to us. It's a critical functionality that we get from SmarTerm."

Remote access is another key benefit of SmarTerm, according to Murray. "I dial in from home frequently," he said. "SmarTerm is a nice piece of software for that. I do some consulting work as well, which involves a lot of remote site testing. Through SmarTerm we can dial in to a host computer and do all of our testing and record all of the testing data right on our laptops or PCs. Then, that is our documentation — our keystrokes as well as everything that was recorded in the capture session. It requires no travel; the only expense is the phone call."

With the SmarTerm upgrade, Murray has had occasion to contact technical support for help with a macro. "I wanted to be able to switch between 80-column and 132-column screen width," he said. "My tech support person wrote a width-toggling button and sent it to me via e-mail. The response time was excellent, and now I can put the button on as many machines as I need. It was a great help."

I'd be back in the stone age without SmarTerm. We've phased out virtually all of our dumb terminals now and replaced them with PCs running SmarTerm.

Ray Murray ■ Laboratory Information Services Supervisor
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