

SUCCESS STORY

DELIVERING SECURE AND COMPLIANT VPN TECHNOLOGY at Brethren Mutual Insurance Company



What Data Networks Did for Brethren Mutual

- Analyzed an existing SSL VPN hardware/firmware/client configuration and recommended specific best practices-oriented improvements
- Installed a new SSL VPN appliance-based solution to replace aging equipment

Abstract

The successful installation of a Pulse Secure appliance-based SSL VPN solution enabled this insurance company to meet evolving business needs.

The challenge

Headquartered in Hagerstown, Maryland, Brethren Mutual Insurance Company (“Brethren”) is a personal, commercial, and farm insurance provider that has been in business for more than 110 years. The company is privately owned by its policyholders, employs approximately 150 professionals, and serves clients in three U.S. states.

Like many organizations, Brethren relies on secure-socket layer (SSL) virtual private network (VPN) technology to conduct business. To adequately support the company’s end users who required secure remote access to the internal network, Brethren implemented the Juniper Networks SA2500 SSL VPN infrastructure (including Network Connect client with host-checker policies). This solution successfully managed Brethren’s endpoint security compliance requirements for many years until more recently when the company’s emerging business needs required technology changes.

To maintain the Juniper Networks-based SSL VPN, Brethren would need to upgrade its hardware. Additionally, Brethren’s decision to upgrade its desktop operating system to Microsoft Windows 10 would necessitate additional firmware updates. However, because Juniper Network Connect was end-of-life, Brethren began investigating a switch to a Windows 10-compatible SSL VPN architecture. According to Brethren Operations Manager Tom Harley, “Our first step required us to find a consulting partner with proven proficiency in our choice solution, the Pulse Secure SSL VPN.” As a trusted Pulse Secure partner, Data Networks ultimately became Brethren’s choice IT solution provider.

The solution

Data Networks proposed and implemented a comprehensive SSL VPN conversion project in which new hardware and firmware were installed, existing configuration settings were migrated to the new hardware, and users were switched over to the Pulse Secure client software. To replace the Juniper hardware, Data Networks engineers installed a pair of high-availability (HA) Pulse Secure PSA3000 appliances complete with the latest firmware, and then mapped existing configuration settings to corresponding settings that controlled the new hardware, and then migrated all settings efficiently.

Upon careful consideration, Data Networks engineers ultimately recommended that Brethren keep its current version of Network Connect as its end user SSL VPN client, citing that not only are end users accustomed to it, but that it is fully compatible with Windows 10 for the time being. Data Networks engineers would, however, proactively preconfigure and develop a new Pulse Secure client that would be ready for an eventual conversion. As explained by Dwayne MacKenzie, Solutions Architect for Secure Networking at Data Networks, "Because our clients sometimes need for us to get creative with our design, we'll provide them with not only an immediate solution that satisfies their requirements, but one that also prepares them for the long haul. In Brethren's case, their current instance of Network Connect was a proven application with which the users were comfortable, so we kept it in the architecture but prepared them for the eventuality of replacing it with the Pulse Secure client."

The result

Data Networks engineers finished the project by moving end users' physical SSL VPN connections from the old hardware to the new Pulse Secure appliances during a planned 30-minute outage period. They then conducted an end-to-end test of the new SSL VPN from end user workstations positioned outside the Brethren firewall to confirm that resulting network connectivity and access matched that of the prior solution. Knowledge transfer from Data Networks to the Brethren IT team regarding the new PSA3000 configuration, a demonstration of the Pulse Secure client designed for future use, and the verified improvements concluded the successful project.

The Pulse Secure SSL VPN architecture was delivered by Data Networks in 10 business days and has since proven itself as a solution that Brethren truly needed in order to keep pace with the insurance industry marketplace. Brethren IT team members have observed excellent connection throughput supported by the HA appliance pair, and the revision of the Network Connect software continues to be a user-friendly client that experiences no issues with Windows 10. The Pulse Secure client stands ready to replace it when the time comes.

About Data Networks

Data Networks provides effective technology-based solutions to meet your unique needs. Our solutions are specifically developed to reduce IT complexity and help you accomplish more.

INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY

By partnering at the highest levels with the industry's most respected manufacturers, Data Networks can deliver the right products for your environment with the most aggressive pricing possible. Our strong vendor relationships also bring technical training opportunities, expedited help desk resources, and professional service liaisons for consulting and project engagements.

INSPIRED ENGINEERING

Our goal is to be your trusted technology advisor. So we staff highly-qualified engineers who bring years of experience and the most advanced technical certifications to every engagement. We assign them a single area of technical focus, a unique approach that allows them to continually update their skills and expand their specialized technical knowledge. And we arm them with documented best practices developed over more than 30 years of public-sector service.

We invite you to learn more at datanetworks.com or by calling 800-283-6387.

"In the insurance industry, we're high-uptime and need to minimize user disruption during technology upgrades," says Brethren Operations Manager Tom Harley. "Data Networks is truly attentive to our needs with regards to this and all other areas. Additionally, we greatly appreciate Data Networks' ability to transfer an existing configuration, such as our SSL VPN settings, to a new solution, without having to reinvent the wheel."