



## CASE STUDY



### Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania Ensures Superior Service With Support from LightPointe Outdoor Wireless Technology

*LightPointe Gigabit Ethernet Building-to-Building Connectivity Solution Meets Health Insurance Provider's Stringent IT Requirements While Delivering Fast ROI*

Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania strives to offer high-quality, affordable healthcare coverage to companies of all sizes, as well as individuals and families. The organization has successfully met this challenge since its founding in 1938. Today, Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania (BCNEPA) is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. Headquartered in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., the company offers a portfolio of health insurance products and administrative services to approximately 600,000 individuals in northeastern and north central Pennsylvania.

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**Jim Slick** | Manager of Network Services,  
Blue Cross of Northeastern  
Pennsylvania

For BCNEPA, being the leading provider of healthcare coverage in its region is more than a matter of pride: it's a responsibility that is taken very seriously. BCNEPA's IT staff makes every effort to deliver 100 percent network uptime, so business-critical data is available 24/7. In the past year, all company standards for network availability have been surpassed—a significant accomplishment for an IT team that supports 300 servers, a mainframe, two RS/6000 servers and the computing needs of some 1,000 employees.

#### THE CHALLENGE:

BCNEPA operates from multiple locations in Wilkes-Barre, including three buildings in the downtown Public Square area. When the company outgrew one of these operations centers, the decision was made to expand to an older building about a block away. After renovations, up to 80 employees initially occupied the new site, relying upon 20Mbps point-to-point links to connect to the corporate network. As the staff at the new quarters grew to 300 employees, network performance slowed dramatically, making it clear much more bandwidth was needed. The company opted to install a 1Gb Synchronous Optical NETWORK (SONET) ring, consisting of a fiber ring connecting multiple nodes that each send, receive and relay messages through an add-drop-multiplexer. While such a configuration met all BCNEPA's stringent requirements for a high-availability network extension, the endeavor was a complex undertaking that would take contractors months to complete.



## CASE STUDY



In the interim, BCNEPA turned to The Presidio Corp., a reseller and integrator based in Colmar, Pa., to identify a temporary solution to deliver the high-capacity bandwidth that the employees so sorely needed, along with seamless access to applications residing on the corporate network. Like all participants in the healthcare industry, HIPAA concerns make top-level security an essential component of any technology decision. According to Jim Slick, manager of network services for BCNEPA, other key concerns included reliability, ease of installation and cost savings. His team evaluated radio frequency (RF), but had reservations about its speed, security and reliability as a primary link. Other alternatives, such as leased T1 lines, were never even considered, due to bandwidth limitations.

Presidio recommended optical wireless based on free-space optics (FSO), a line-of-sight technology that provides high-speed bandwidth using beams of light for sending and receiving voice, video and data. Optical wireless operates at full-duplex speeds up to 1.25Gbps and offers a variety of distance ranges for customers that need secure, high-bandwidth connectivity between buildings or in campus environments. In addition, optical wireless installs quickly and easily, making it ideal for temporary network extensions.

“We recognize that HIPAA is a driving force for customers such as Blue Cross,” said Mike Tamaro, senior account manager at Presidio. “When you combine the company’s HIPAA security requirements with other criteria such as speed, reliability, ease of deployment and budget, there is only one viable option for temporary connectivity between buildings: optical wireless.”

Impressed with the technology, Slick took the next step in the evaluation process. He began assessing the market players and determining the products that best met the company’s needs. After researching a number of offerings, Tamaro felt BCNEPA would benefit most from the throughput and reliability delivered by LightPointe, a pioneer in the development of optical wireless solutions. LightPointe designs and manufactures license-free, high-speed Outdoor Wireless products that link two or more buildings with classic LAN-to-LAN backbone connectivity, providing bandwidth from 100Mbps up to 1.25Gbps while eliminating the installation challenges of fiber.

LightPointe’s relationship with Cisco was a key point in its favor since BCNEPA had standardized on Cisco for all its networking products. Tamaro knew LightPointe had successfully deployed numerous installations in Cisco “shops” over the years. For Slick, this was reassuring because selecting a non-Cisco product was a major departure: BCNEPA had never deviated from Cisco for any of its network infrastructure. “The benefits of the LightPointe solution far outweighed any reservations we had about introducing a non-Cisco product into our network for the first time,” he said. “Ultimately, we chose the LightPointe FlightLite G because it offered speed, reliability and security at a tremendous cost savings.”

### THE SOLUTION:

LightPointe’s FlightLite G provides BCNEPA with full-duplex Gigabit Ethernet throughput (1.25Gbps) for its data-intensive enterprise connectivity needs. Ideal for high-bandwidth applications such as Voice over IP (VoIP), digital medical imaging and video, it is also immune to RF interference and the licensing or deployment challenges of competing alternatives. With a lightweight, compact design, the FlightLite G also features rugged weatherproof housing for outdoor installation in a range of temperatures and conditions.



## CASE STUDY



The LightPointe system was installed at BCNEPA over two days in late 2005. With the new building only 300 yards across the street from the Public Square office, a clear line of sight was available, making for a straightforward wireless connection. Mounting systems for placing the wireless devices on the rooftops were delivered and installed by LightPointe, with Presidio's assistance. To ease into use of the FlightLite G, Slick and his team participated in a one-day orientation session. Their close involvement in the installation also aided their understanding of the system.

### THE BENEFITS:

Immediately after installation, employees at the new building began reaping the benefits of the network connection provided by the FlightLite G, with significantly greater bandwidth delivering noticeable improvements in productivity. "The performance issues they had endured were instantly eliminated," said Slick. "Our high-bandwidth proprietary applications were once again operating at full speed, as if employees were accessing them from the main offices."

Reliability of the link has been flawless, much to the delight of an IT team dedicated to maintaining its reputation for 100-percent uptime. Since installation in late Fall of 2005, the FlightLite G has withstood heavy fog, rain and blizzards—during the region's harshest weather months—performing impeccably. Although the FlightLite G was purchased as a temporary link while the SONET ring was installed, BCNEPA now has decided the LightPointe solution will serve as an ideal backup link for improved disaster recovery. "With all its capabilities, the FlightLite G will play a pivotal role as a secondary link in our final network configuration for the new building," said Slick.

Aside from reliability, the cost benefit of the FlightLite G has been substantial. As a primary device, the system is projected to save the company about \$40,000 (USD) per year over the previous 20Mbps solution. As a backup, it will save \$70,000 to \$80,000 yearly over competing alternatives, when used in conjunction with the new SONET ring.

"In the end, you can't put a price on the value of reliable connectivity," said Slick. "The FlightLite G has met and exceeded all of our expectations."

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### CUSTOMER:

Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania (BCNEPA), headquartered in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. ([www.bcnepa.com](http://www.bcnepa.com))

### INDUSTRY:

Health insurance products and administrative services

### RESELLER:

The Presidio Corp., based in Colmar, Pa. ([www.presidio.com](http://www.presidio.com))

### CHALLENGES:

- Escalating growth required expansion to a satellite office a block away from its headquarters in downtown Wilkes-Barre.
- While awaiting completion of a SONET ring, a temporary network extension was required to support high-bandwidth healthcare applications and email.
- A half – to one Gigabit of throughput was required.
- HIPAA compliance raised security concerns for the building-to-building connectivity solution.
- Reliability and costs were also concerns.

### SOLUTION:

- LightPointe FlightLite G, offering full-duplex Gigabit Ethernet throughput (1.25Gbps), provides temporary connectivity as a primary link until completion of the SONET ring.
- Ultimately, the FlightLite G will be used as a secondary link to backup the SONET ring.

### BENEFITS:

- As temporary primary link, cost savings of \$40,000 (USD) per year when compared to previous 20 Mbps solution.
- As secondary link, cost savings of \$70,000 to \$80,000 per year when compared with other alternatives.
- Superior throughput for bandwidth-intensive applications.
- Secure, reliable LAN extension withstands inclement weather and protects critical data.