

The Linc Group Connects Business Units with Juniper Networks SSL VPN Solution

**Organization:**

The Linc Group, an operating company for two mechanical and electrical service providers and is a franchise operator for mechanical contractors

Industry:

Commercial and industrial markets

Challenge:

Securely connecting multiple locations to enable communication and increase productivity

Solution:

Juniper Networks NetScreen SSL VPN solution

Benefits:

- One infrastructure to allow for collaboration and increased productivity
- Leverage of information and business resources on The Linc Group's corporate network
- Integration of franchises into the company within a matter of hours/days

"We can get these franchises completely engaged in our environment without changing any piece of their infrastructure. The SSL VPN offers the lowest financial and operational impact for us and the franchisee businesses. We give them anywhere, anytime access to The Linc Group resources, including our portal based technical troubleshooting and library resources."

Greg Lush
The Linc Group
Chief Information Officer

Background

The Linc Group is an operating company for two mechanical and electrical service providers and is a franchise operator for mechanical contractors. Its focus is on the commercial and industrial markets, including working on equipment such as air conditioning, process control systems and more. The company operates coast-to-coast with 109 locations in 43 states and also includes approximately 120 franchise locations in the United States representing 1,400 employees.

The Linc Group is a company that consists of numerous other business units that fell out of the Enron Corporation bankruptcy. As a result, there were multiple systems in place but these systems didn't work across other business units. Some of the offices were within a mile from each other, but they rarely collaborated or shared resources. Greg Lush, Chief Information Officer of The Linc Group realized they had to implement technology that would enable communication and increased productivity while having applications, such as email, accounting, payroll, safety management and human resource communications, accessible by one system.

"The five businesses under The Linc Group had been running in such silos that they could never leverage each other and now we've solved that issue. We centralized our administrative processes and implemented all new equipment, but we knew we had more to do," said Lush. "We knew with the infusion of good business practices, a solid service environment and the latest technology, we could make The Linc Group into a great nationwide service organization."

Approximately 150 of The Linc Group's employees work in the field at customer sites. For example, The Linc Group employees work onsite at a large customer's paper mill in Alabama because the customer, like many customer locations, requires administrative staff at their site. The customer provides The Linc Group employees with network and computer access into their internal network, but Lush had to figure out a way to connect his employees back into The Linc Group's network.

The Solution

In early 2004, Lush turned to his trusted data security partner, KnowledgeCentrix, for an extranet access solution. KnowledgeCentrix provides full-service IT solutions to small and medium-sized businesses that require on-demand IT services.

Applying its proven methodology, KnowledgeCentrix analyzed the inefficiencies generated by disconnected The Linc Group field employees and recommended the Juniper Networks NetScreen Secure Access SSL VPN appliances. The Linc Group deployed a Secure Access 3000 to create a secure extranet environment, providing employees direct, controlled remote access to select networked applications and resources through The Linc Group portal.

The SSL VPN's access privilege management features provide The Linc Group IT personnel flexibility in defining authentication and authorization policies for various user groups, including distinct subgroups within The Linc Group business units. This enables Lush and his staff to provision remote access by need or purpose for each employee. Business units can now access documents stored in the network from anywhere, anytime in one place, versus searching separate databases. The single point of entry into a centralized database enables better information access and exchange between facilities to improve productivity.

The Linc Group has also benefited from the forms- and headers-based single sign on (SSO) capabilities of the SSL VPN. These capabilities eliminate the need for users to maintain and enter multiple passwords at each step of accessing the network and at various application servers that need to be accessed.

With the SSL VPNs deployed, The Linc Group's employees simply launch a Web browser on any computing device with an Internet connection, including those provided at customer locations and direct the browser to the URL defined for The Linc Group's portal. Upon logging in and being authenticated, The Linc Group users gain access to all applications they are authorized to see in the same way as if

they were physically at one of the company's locations. The Linc Group also has 120 existing franchise operators for mechanical contractors throughout the U.S. which can benefit from access enabled by the SSL VPN. Lush has deployed SSL VPN access to 10 of these locations and others are interested in future implementations of remote SSL VPN access for themselves.

The Benefits

The Linc Group set out with three distinct goals: 1) bring mechanical and electrical service providers together through one infrastructure to allow for collaboration and increased productivity; 2) enable contractor franchises to leverage information and business resources on The Linc Group's corporate network and 3) allow for newly acquired companies to be integrated into the company within a matter of hours/days. Lush and his team achieve these goals and because of the Juniper Networks SSL VPN, they have changed the way their employees work with increased productivity and efficiency.

"We now offer the franchises the ability to log onto our network to access specific resources," said Lush. "We simply provide franchises with an extranet URL address and a password and within seconds they are connected into our network like an extended family member. This enables our franchises to focus on providing mechanical contracting services versus worrying about building their infrastructure and processes."

Lush continued, "We can get these franchises completely engaged in our environment without changing any piece of their infrastructure. The SSL VPN offers the lowest financial and operational impact for us and the franchisee businesses. We give them anywhere, anytime access to The Linc Group resources, including our portal based technical troubleshooting and library resources."

The Linc Group plans to acquire additional companies to continue building a bigger national, pure services company. The SSL VPN will enable Lush and his team to quickly integrate newly acquired companies into The Linc Group Network.

"With the SSL VPN, we have a rapid deployment model where we can literally purchase a company within a week – complete the deal on a Tuesday and then on that Wednesday morning get all the new employees on our email system, our portal, network and more," said Lush. "The quicker we can get the new employees via the acquisitions and mergers pulled into our culture and feeling like they are part of our family, the better."



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