

# National Pharmacies prescribes IBC for online success



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Peter Skuse, Manager – Information Systems  
National Pharmacies

## **Client**

National Pharmacies

## **Industry**

Retail

## **The Company**

National Pharmacies operates about 80 pharmacies and optical outlets in metropolitan and regional South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales.

## **Business Challenge**

### ***Creating corporate synergy within a widely distributed organisation***

After rapid growth in the early 2000s, Australian healthcare company National Pharmacies decided to replace its congested corporate computer network.

National Pharmacies, the trading name of the Friendly Society Medical Association Limited, is a mutual organisation that recognised quality technology and communication systems were essential to its corporate success and its ability to integrate retail operations that spanned three states.

As well as a state-of-the-art distribution centre in the Adelaide suburb of Hendon, National Pharmacies operates about 80 retail outlets in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, employing a staff of about 1200.

National Pharmacies' Manager – Information Systems Peter Skuse said the old network had compromised the organisation's ability to access corporate servers for email, file transfer and access to back-end applications. “Back then, we wanted our pharmacies to have fast and reliable access to our network to make our entire operations more efficient,” he said.

“Additionally, as we already had more than 1000 employees in three states, we wanted to use our corporate intranet to communicate with staff more effectively, which required faster, dependable network access.”

After an extensive examination of the marketplace, National Pharmacies chose a private Internet Protocol (IP) solution provided by national broadband company Internode.

National Pharmacies' deployment of the Internode Business Connect (IBC) service proved to be a game-changing move that did more than just improve the network bandwidth available to pharmacies by replacing dial-up modems with ADSL2+ broadband services.

## Internode Solution

### *A high-speed private national network with ADSL2+ links to stores*

In December 2003, Internode migrated all National Pharmacies branches and its distribution centre to broadband services, giving them high-speed, always-on access to the corporate network and the Internet. This met the organisation's need for improved bandwidth and network reliability.

At the network's core is IBC, Internode's tailored wide area networking solution built on its private national network. By using a range of access technologies to connect sites across Australia, IBC provides the 21st Century alternative to traditional frame relay and ISDN wide area networks.

Traffic engineering optimises network performance to meet the demanding Quality of Service requirements of internal business networks, ensuring that time-critical data traffic such as voice and video receive priority over less urgent services, such as web browsing.

As well as improving National Pharmacies' internal communications by increasing the speed, quality and reliability of its corporate network, IBC has simplified the process of bringing new pharmacies online.

Mr. Skuse said IBC gave each pharmacy an ADSL2+ broadband connection that was unconstrained by retail Internet users. "That gives us the quality," he said. "IBC is structured as a business solution, so our pipe into the Internet and into our branches is not throttled back by mum and dad users at home.

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## *Business Benefits*

### *A stable Internet platform on which to build innovative online services*

National Pharmacies has also used IBC as a foundation upon which it has delivered new online services that contribute to its improved productivity, profitability and responsiveness. The benefits include reducing paperwork, speeding up transactions and contributing to improved efficiency, as well as staff and customer satisfaction.

Mr. Skuse said the IBC core network was very stable. "The benefit of having a reliable Internet platform is it has given us the ability to make decisions quickly and to take advantage of opportunities that are arising through the Internet," he said.

An example is PBS Online, which processes Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme claims in real time, so National Pharmacies can immediately verify Medicare and other health benefit numbers and authenticate prescriptions. This also allows for quicker payment under the PBS program and reduces the risk that claims could be rejected.

IBC has also enabled the company to deploy an Employee Self Service system, which allows employees to check their leave entitlements and apply for annual leave online.

National Pharmacies uses IBC to collect data from its retail outlets for Business Intelligence reporting and even allows its suppliers to electronically access product sales data from its dispensary systems.

Mr. Skuse said IBC and Internode had definitely lived up to National Pharmacies' expectations. "After several years of a rolling annual contract with Internode, we had a more formal review last cycle by going back to the market in late 2010," he said.

"As a result, we have signed a new contract with Internode, which continues this successful, long-term relationship for another two years."

## *About Internode*

Internode is a first tier IP carrier committed to using broadband technology to redefine the national telecommunications environment. The Australian-owned company is a trailblazer that delivers broadband services to individuals and businesses throughout Australia. Follow Internode online at [www.internode.on.net/about/follow\\_us\\_online](http://www.internode.on.net/about/follow_us_online).

*To learn more about Internode's business services, please visit [www.internode.on.net](http://www.internode.on.net) or telephone 13-NODE (13 66 33).*