

Inside Perspective

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Simplified Sign-On—Planning, deployment, and support (Part 3 of 3) Scott Blanchette, Principal Consultant

Simplified Sign-On (SSO) can play an important role in ensuring that your organization has the ability to meet growing security requirements while streamlining access to vital information assets. In this final installment of this series of articles about Simplified Sign-On, we will focus on approaches that you may want to consider in planning for, deploying, and ultimately supporting SSO as a MEDITECH hospital. (If you missed the first two SSO articles, please see the 2007 July and September newsletter issues)

As with most complex, enterprise-wide IT projects, a Simplified Sign-On deployment requires significant planning, research, and design. Depending on the size of your organization and the complexity of your application environment, you may need to take a multi-phased approach to SSO.

Typically, the three key phases would include:

Phase I: Planning, Design, and Selection — Including careful scope and expectation setting

Phase II: Core Deployment — Core applications (MEDITECH, PACS, Microsoft, etc.), core users (clinical users), and core technologies (Secure Authentication, Identity Management, and Single Sign-On)

Phase III: Advanced Functionality — Session and context management, additional important but non-core applications, and a broader user group.

Many organizations also include a pilot phase to validate the design and technology in a smaller, more manageable environment before embarking on the enterprise-wide deployment.

Where will the funding come from?

One of the significant challenges of an SSO initiative is obtaining the funding and project resources required to fully implement and support the technologies. Depending upon the technologies selected for authentication and session management-e.g., RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) per workstation costs could easily reach hundreds of dollars. This can put the costs of a fully implemented SSO solution into the same price range as several other high profile IT projects, requiring difficult funding decisions.

Compared to some other initiatives, the return on investment for SSO can be difficult to quantify. However look for value from SSO in the following areas:

- The value of an improved EMR and advanced clinical system platform, with improvements in system usage and data quality due to streamlined access.
- The value of risk avoidance due to reduced exposure to information security issues. This could include a reduced exposure to potential litigation, and perhaps even more important, a reduced risk of loss in public confidence through a high profile, public patient information leak.
- The value of improved efficiency across the user community through streamlined accessibility.
- The value of improved clinician satisfaction.
- The value of changes in IT operations as support staff spends less resources resolving password and access issues

Deployment

Once you've convinced the organization to invest in SSO, and selected the best solution for your organization, you're ready to begin implementation. Here are some useful checklists.

First, be sure that your current environment is capable of supporting SSO. Do you have:

- A robust, reliable infrastructure?
- Adequate network performance and robust network services?
- Sufficient client devices to support user requirements?
- Quality underlying applications that produce end user value?
- A modern desktop environment?
- Sufficient remote access capabilities via VPN (Virtual Private Network) or Citrix/MTS?

For the SSO deployment project, do you have:

- Effective project management disciplines?
- Adequate project resourcing?
- Sufficient project funding and realistic timelines?
- Leadership support?
- Vendor support (especially third party application vendors)?
- A strong understanding of user requirements, with clear expectations already set?
- Clear and consistent communication with the organization throughout the project?

Support

To effectively support SSO after it has been deployed, do you have:

- IT staff with skills developed to support the new technologies?
- Sufficient tools to manage the new technologies?
- The ability to respond quickly to support issues in clinical areas?
- Reliable and robust technology and infrastructure?

Beyond funding and management of a wide-scale project such as Simplified Sign-On, be mindful of an additional challenge specific to enabling technology projects. Occasionally, organizations get so caught up in the technology that they lose sight of the overall strategic objectives and place too much of a focus on the best route to get there. Too much attention on the particular solution, or too many resources devoted to SSO, and not to improving the underlying healthcare applications could result in a negative backlash from the organization. Clinicians, executives, and users need to be reassured that management and IT focus is still on what they feel is most important: easy to use, reliable tools that improve their ability to provide care to their patients.

As discussed throughout this series of articles, Simplified Sign-On can bring significant benefits to your organization by improving access to clinicians and staff to the information they need to deliver safe and reliable patient care, while still giving the patient information the level of security required.

As always, JJWild is ready and able to help at any and every stage of your SSO project—planning, deployment, and/or support. For more information, contact editor@jjwild.com.

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