

Broadband Improvements

The Australian Federal Government's election promise to improve Australia's languishing broadband network has given independent optometric groups an opportunity to more confidently implement centralised practice management software systems.

The Rudd Government's recently released 'First 100 Days' report states that \$100 million is being allocated to upgrade to the more reliable fibre-optic technology. In addition, approval has been given for Telstra to upgrade 900 exchanges in metropolitan and regional areas to ADSL2+ resulting in a 10-fold or more increase in speed in those areas.

This faster and more reliable broadband network will bring Australia into line with international standards and will allow optometric groups to gain efficiencies and improve service levels by centralising their practice management systems (PMS).

A centralised network allows all practice branches to access a single set of patient records, stock list and appointment book as well as producing centralised reports that will save you time, reduce errors, provide a more seamless service to patients and lead to more informed management decisions. The hardware and software cost of setting up new practices is reduced; new practices simply hook in to the centralised system.

The general broadband upgrades planned by the Federal Government will make concerns about internet reliability almost obsolete. If there are concerns about reliability, the larger providers like Telstra offer business grade internet services that have service level agreements guaranteeing up-time to ensure business operators peace of mind.

Once ADSL internet connections are in place at each remote practice and an ADSL2 or equivalent internet connection is set up at the head practice, a computer networking company like Bluewave Optometry Networks is able to deploy a Microsoft server based wide-area-network (WAN) to underpin the centralised PMS. The PMS is made available through Microsoft's Terminal Services technology in conjunction with a hardware based Virtual Private Network.

Migrating from multiple databases (one in each practice) to a centralised system should be done in consultation with your PMS vendor, your IT support provider and your optometric instrument manufacturer or distributor to ensure a smooth migration. Using a service provider who has experience setting up this type of advanced computer network in combination with sophisticated PMS databases is the best way to reduce stress and the risk of project failure.

As the Federal Government continues to roll out the promised broadband improvements, more optometry groups, particularly in regional areas, will be able to take advantage of a centralised PMS and be more competitive with larger international groups.

Visit www.pm.gov.au/docs/first_100_days.pdf for details of the 'First 100 Days' report.

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