



Case Study

Health Business Systems meets the connectivity needs of pharmacies using Equinox serial hubs

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Ken Schaad

VP of Technical Services

Health Business Systems, Inc.

● **Adapting to change is key to finding the right solution for pharmacies**

Health Business Systems, Inc. (HBS), a leader in pharmacy management systems technology since the early 80s, provides turnkey solutions for pharmacies. The HBS service lineup includes point-of-sale (POS) devices, pharmacy systems, online services, product installation and full system support.

Based near Philadelphia, Pa., HBS has grown to serve not only smaller independent pharmacies, but also pharmacy chains, institutional, and mail order pharmacies with a solution that delivers sensitive and accurate patient information. Serving over 1,200 retail pharmacies in the U.S., HBS includes a software package within its scalable solution.

In any large organization, time and changing technology produce new and interesting challenges. With one eye always on the future, HBS officials knew they faced two situations that required immediate but well-planned attention:

- They were under a time constraint to satisfy a Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance that requires increased attention to keeping patient information secure and private.
- With increased competition from larger pharmacy chains, it was crucial they keep independent pharmacies productive and profitable.

● **Pharmacies demand quick turnkey solutions to stay competitive**

To comply with HIPAA as quickly as possible, HBS' pharmacy customers needed to implement a turnkey solution to streamline the checkout process and give them more time to interact with the patient. To address the issue of competition from larger pharmacy chains that faced the independents, HBS wanted to implement a solution that was more cost-effective and modular.



The ESP-2 MI serial hub provides RS-232, RS-422 and RS-485 serial connections for a variety of applications to connect up to two devices.

“Most independent pharmacies run latent technology and have limited budgets. These pharmacies usually run Linux-based software to operate their systems,” explained Ken Schaad, vice-president of technical services for Health Business Systems. “HBS can provide turnkey solutions that meet the needs of these independent pharmacies by providing custom-built POS systems, allowing them to keep up with customer prescription demands.”

In addition to helping smaller, independent pharmacies, HBS needed to provide their chain, multi-site pharmacies, institutional, and remote distribution pharmacies with technology for their connectivity needs. HBS was using Equinox SST multiport adapters as part of their turnkey pharmacy package. SST multiport adapters are dependent on the server, so it was useful at the time for pharmacies with multiple stations that had their own server.

While HBS had a steady performer in the Equinox bus-based SST multiport serial adapters, pharmacy demands called for a network-based product that allowed serial connectivity of retail point-of-sale devices. Typical pharmacy POS devices consist of a credit card reader, bar code scanner, and label printer, among other services.

With demand on the rise for a cleaner solution, HBS began a search for a product that could provide connectivity of serial POS devices over IP. Serial connectivity over IP eliminates excessive cabling and provides easier management of serial pharmacy peripherals.

Serial over IP proves right choice

The search was brief. As an Equinox customer for several years, HBS experienced the value and quality of Equinox products in the implementation of their initial turnkey solutions.

They had previously selected Equinox SST-8P adapters for the smaller, independent pharmacies. For larger pharmacies dependent on the server, SST-64P and SST-128P adapters were installed to connect serial devices.

In 2003, HBS learned that Equinox was in testing phase for the ESP-2 MI Ethernet serial hub, the compact 2-port multi-interface serial hub with RS-232, RS-422 and RS-485 support. HBS agreed to serve as a beta center for the new appliance and put it to the test.

It proved to be the ideal solution for the smaller pharmacies. The ESP-2 MI serial hub would allow them to connect up to two serial devices over IP. After three months of testing, overall product usability exceeded HBS' expectations. As a bonus, the price per port for the ESP-2 MI serial hub was on target with the company's budget. A positive experience with Equinox sales and technical support helped seal the purchase decision, when an initial configuration issue was encountered in the test phase.

The ESP-2 MI serial hub particularly improved the pharmacy checkout process known as the front-end system. These front-end systems run pharmacy applications on networked workstations. The back-end system accepts query requests sent from a front-end application, processes those requests, and returns the results to the workstation.

“The use of Ethernet technology in the point-of-sale environment is necessary for expansion,” said Schaad. “Our experience with Equinox SST multiport adapters has also been very helpful in learning the ESP-2 MI serial hub product which resulted in a very short learning curve. Our time goes into the use of the product rather than having to learn how it works.” As a result, the product's ease of installation and configuration allowed HBS to meet customer needs with HIPAA compliance requirements in a timely manner.

Equinox support brings peace of mind

The smooth integration of the ESP-2 MI serial hub as part of pharmacy turnkey solutions has been positive for Health Business Systems and its customers. HBS ordered hundreds of units, initially purchasing 400 ESP-2 MI serial hubs for its first roll out, and currently has 600 units deployed in the field.

“Equinox is a reliable partner with a very responsive sales and support team,” said Schaad. “If a company requires cost-effective and reliable serial connectivity solutions, Equinox can make it happen. The benefits that Equinox provides allow pharmacies to have peace of mind knowing that they have reliable POS connectivity with mission-critical front-end and back-end support.”

About Equinox

Equinox, an Avocent Company, is the leading serial connectivity provider of high-speed serial communications and port management. Serial connectivity products deliver flexible, reliable and cost-effective solutions for a wide variety of applications. The Equinox award-winning SuperSerial Technology (SST) product line offers connectivity built to last and easy to manage with management software that is included with every Equinox product.

Serial connectivity products include Secure Console Management over IP and Serial over IP appliances. Secure Console Management over IP products consist of CCM console managers available in 8, 16 and 48-port models. Serial over IP products consist of serial hubs available in 2, 8 and 16-port models and a terminal server available in 16-ports. Flexible bus-based products include a range of multiport serial adapters available from 4 to 128 ports, connector panels and cabling options for both server and workstation. For more information about Equinox products, visit www.equinox.com

About Health Business Systems, Inc.

Health Business Systems, Inc. (HBS) is the leader in providing innovative methods for retail, institutional, common profile (multi-store chain) pharmacy systems, remote distribution, and point-of-sale pharmacy management. The HBS ongoing mission is to provide clients with the highest quality solutions for their growing needs. Health Business Systems, Inc. has served the pharmaceutical industry for more than three decades and today has an account base of over 1,300 systems.