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USB tokens tighten up secure-WAN links

Start-up Sweet Spot combines two-factor authentication and encryption.

By [Tim Greene](#), 06/06/06

The latest addition to corporate secure-WAN toolkits are USB tokens that authenticate and encrypt traffic, tighten security and make it simpler for users to make connections vs. using standard VPN technology.

Start-up [Sweet Spot](#), incorporates two-factor authentication via their tokens, increasing the security of user authentication as well as encrypting traffic. Alternatives would call for a VPN plus separate two-factor authentication such as RSA Secure ID tokens.

Sweet Spot's tokens perform a different function. They also authenticate remote machines via two-factor authentication with a Sweet Spot appliance inside the corporate firewall. But once authenticated, they act as VPN clients, creating a secure tunnel between the remote machine and the Sweet Spot appliance. Alternatively, the tokens can tunnel to third-party VPN gateways. So far the tokens are compatible with VPN gateways made by Astaro, Cisco, Nortel and Watchguard Technologies.

Because the tokens perform the function of VPN client software, businesses don't have to install this software on the remote machines. They also eliminate cumbersome VPN sign-on procedures, says Sweet Spot customer Mark Snyder, regional IT director for Native Air, a helicopter ambulance service in Mesa, Ariz.

Laptops used by medical personnel on flights to record patient information are equipped with the tokens to set up wireless VPN connections to Native Air billing and quality-control application servers at headquarters. The sensitive data must be secured to comply with Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act regulations, Snyder says.

The tokens eliminate the need to train medical personnel on using VPN clients. They also result in reports getting filed from hospitals via broadband wireless Internet connections rather than waiting for personnel to plug into a LAN at a helicopter base. This clears paperwork sooner and gets flight crews ready for the next flight sooner, Snyder says.

The tokens cost \$135 each.