

HJF Uses Zscaler™ to Help Military Researchers Battle COVID-19



Henry M. Jackson Foundation
for the Advancement of Military
Medicine (HJF)

www.hjf.org

Location: Headquartered in Bethesda,
Maryland, U.S.

Industry: Nonprofit

Zscaler Products: Zscaler Private Access™,
Zscaler Internet Access™

The Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine (HJF) is a nonprofit that supports scientific research programs across military and government. HJF provides about 1,500 research programs with administrative support, such as HR or finance, but also manages IT and provides access to high-performance computing. These research projects range from cancer research, combat care, disaster preparedness, and clinical and rehabilitative medicine to infectious disease control.

Battling COVID-19

In the midst of the global battle against COVID-19, HJF was determined to fight the pandemic on two fronts: supporting domestic and international partners who are working on innovative countermeasures, and keeping its team and the communities in which they live and serve safe by helping mitigate the spread of the disease. To accomplish this, HJF quickly needed to find a way to get a number of its staff, researchers, and partners remote access to critical applications as they transitioned to working from home while continuing to support their colleagues in the labs.

The need for speed

HJF rolled out Zscaler Private Access (ZPA™) to 600 users in record time. “We had been looking for a solution to replace Citrix, but were talking about traditional VPNs at that point,” said Marc De Serio, CTO at HJF.

But when COVID-19 hit, the IT team had to act quickly. “My architect said he had a solution that could probably get the entire organization ready to work from home in two days,” De Serio added. “That was a no-brainer. Ultimately, it took about 48 hours between us making the first phone call to the time everyone was on ZPA.”

Throughout the process, a small team, led by HJF’s lead architect Tom Sellie, worked closely with the Zscaler team to deploy ZPA.

“ Zscaler proves that IT can be an agile player. It took about 48 hours between us making the initial phone call to the time everyone was on ZPA. It’s not always the six-month, one-year roadmap to change and to innovate. With the right partner, you can do it quickly and effectively. ”

– Marc De Serio
CTO
HJF

The need for scale

In 2019, HJF had deployed Zscaler Internet Access™ (ZIA™) to its geographically dispersed staff to centralize internet access policies, implement controls and gain visibility. “With Zscaler, we have a single pane of glass of all activities,” De Serio said.

“Through this implementation, HJF was able to demonstrate why we are a trusted partner for military medical research,” added Rizwan Jan, CIO at HJF.

Having followed the Zscaler best practice of deploying Zscaler Client Connector (formerly Zscaler App/Z App) on all endpoints as part of its ZIA deployment, HJF was able to quickly turn on ZPA by leveraging the existing Client Connector deployment.

Zscaler sunsets traditional VPN

For HJF, time was of the essence. VPN would have taken the team four to six weeks to roll out due to the need for appliances, according to De Serio. This would have had a direct impact on the efficiency of staff contributing to work on countermeasures to the COVID-19 virus. Thanks to ZPA, the transition to work from home was seamless. And, within three days of everyone working from home, the team went back to a normal amount of support calls—about 15 per day.

“If it was in a Citrix environment, we would have stayed in the hundreds of calls every day,” De Serio said. “And that would have meant not being able to get to other work that IT needs to focus on to make sure the research is getting done.”

The same applies to the security team. “We did not have to worry about security. In a VPN scenario, I think our security team would have worked triple time chasing down endpoints and malware,” De Serio said.

WINS

- Enabled business continuity through work from home.
- Showcased that IT is a business differentiator, not an overhead.
- Freed up time for IT teams to focus on critical tasks, not answering support calls.

A win for IT

Jan and De Serio have been focused on transforming the IT organization from a culture of being very timid on technology to being at its forefront and introducing best-in-breed solutions. This vision has shifted how the group is perceived across HJF—from IT being an overhead to becoming a business partner that is the powerhouse behind innovation.

“Because of Zscaler, we were able to be very agile in changing course on a dime,” De Serio said. “We have been getting nothing but praise from other departments that they are able to continue their work from home.”

“The great user experience has brought us great trust and equity from the people we support,” added Jan.

“Zscaler basically sunsets the idea of a traditional VPN.”

– **Marc De Serio** | CTO | HJF

Unlocking the supply chain

HJF researchers work with government agencies to sequence the DNA of COVID-19. By enabling employees to seamlessly transition to working from home, HJF avoided disruptions to its supply chain, which, among other things, provides dye for DNA sequencing machines to HJF researchers that cooperate with government agencies to map the genome of the virus to develop treatments.

