Network Security Is Top Priority for School District

A Case Study in Internet Security

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OVERVIEW

Belton School District (Belton) is located in Cass County, Missouri, 20 miles south of downtown Kansas City. It comprises 10 campuses, providing preschool through high school education for more than 5,600 students. Additionally, Belton employs more than 800 faculty members across its 10 schools and district offices.

In 2005 Belton put in place a central network to connect its individual schools to the district offices, as well as to streamline management of the network.

“We have eight IT staff for the entire school district – that’s eight people supporting 11 schools, 26 computer labs, 800 faculty, 1,400 computers and 5,600 students,” said Troy Shaw, Belton School District network administrator. “Therefore it is important for us to find ways to consolidate and streamline as much as possible, so we’re not duplicating efforts or running around trying to manage different systems at different campuses.”

Belton’s network is used for several purposes including providing Internet access to the 1,400 computers across the district, and housing the district’s email server and student information database.

THE CHALLENGE

Network security is a top priority for Belton, focusing primarily on two fronts: securing the confidential student information that is stored in its central database, as well as ensuring the students themselves are protected from unsuitable content on the Web.

Belton's central database stores all student records including attendance, medical, report card, and special need information. Much of the student data is not only confidential personal information, but is also required by the state of Missouri to be reported in order to receive government funding. Additionally, the Child Information Protection Act of 2004 requires school districts that receive federal funding to block certain Web sites.

"In today's world, network security is just as important as physical security for schools. We need to ensure the students are supervised while they are on campus, but at the same time make sure their personal information is protected and that the right safeguards are in place while they are surfing the Web in the classroom or computer lab," added Shaw.

THE WATCHGUARD SOLUTION

Due to the increasing sophistication of its network, Belton decided to look for a new security solution that could meet all of its specific requirements. Up until then, the district had been using a home-grown Linux system that had been developed by one of its network administrators six years ago. The home-grown system had worked well for Belton; however the district now required a solution that could not only provide top-level network security, but also be scalable and easy enough to manage so any of the IT staff could make changes quickly if necessary.

Belton evaluated several appliances including products from SonicWall and Cisco before finally deciding on WatchGuard. The district selected WatchGuard over the others as it offered all of the security functionality it required without having to make significant changes or upgrades, and had the most intuitive management interface – all at the right price point the Firebox X700's scalability, the department can also easily increase the number of users with remote access connections back to their central office as their network grows.

"After evaluating solutions from several different vendors, it was clear that WatchGuard was above and beyond the others," said Shaw. "Ease-of-use was also an important factor. With our home-grown system, there was one person who could make changes to the settings or add new sites to block. If that person wasn't around, there was really nothing that could be done."

SUMMARY

Belton is currently using the WatchGuard Firebox® X8000 appliance. The Firebox X8000 is part of WatchGuard's Firebox X Peak™ line, the highest-performance line of unified threat management (UTM) appliances from the company. Capable of gigabit-per-second throughput, it provides the reliability, redundancy, traffic management, and port density that demanding, high-speed networks require. In addition, it is easy to deploy and manage using WatchGuard System Manager (WSM) 8.x, an intuitive user interface with real-time monitoring, drag-and-drop VPN creation, secure centralized logging, and historical reporting.

With its Intelligent Layered Security supplying true zero day protection, the Firebox X8000 provides Belton with fully integrated network security, stopping viruses, worms, spyware, trojans, and blended threats, without the window of vulnerability that comes from relying solely on signatures. Additionally, WatchGuard's WebBlocker provides Belton with the integrated URL filtering, monitoring, and reporting mandated by the Child Information Protection Act.

"We've been WatchGuard customers for five years now and continue to be extremely happy with the company's products and support," concluded Shaw. "It's pretty simple – WatchGuard offers better security, straight out of the box, which is exactly what we need."

For more information about WatchGuard Security Solutions, visit us at www.watchguard.com, or contact your reseller.

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ABOUT WATCHGUARD
Since 1996, WatchGuard Technologies has provided reliable, easy to manage security appliances to hundreds of thousands of businesses worldwide. Our Firebox X family of unified threat management (UTM) solutions provides the best combination of strong, reliable, multi-layered security with the best ease of use in its class. All products are backed by LiveSecurity® Service, a ground-breaking support and maintenance program. WatchGuard is a privately owned company, headquartered in Seattle, Washington, with offices throughout North America, Europe, Asia Pacific, and Latin America. For more information, please visit www.watchguard.com.