



Centralized, Simplified Secure Connectivity Across 50 Hotels

A case study in network security

BACKGROUND

Concord Hospitality Enterprises Company is one of North America's largest hotel management and development companies. They manage 50 hotels encompassing some of the world's best-known hospitality brands including Marriott Hotels and Resorts, Renaissance Hotels and Resorts, Courtyard by Marriott, Residence Inn by Marriott, SpringHill Suites by Marriott, Fairfield Inn and Suites by Marriott, Holiday Inn and MainStay Suites by Choice Hotels.

To handle back-end operations for their highly distributed enterprise, the Concord network operations center hosts every kind of application – from document management to housekeeping task-tracking - from centralized accounting to maintenance – and from business intelligence to unified communications. More than 700 individual desktops spread across the 50 hotels and within corporate headquarters access those applications via web-based interfaces. Secure, anytime access allows Concord employees to maximize revenues while delivering the optimum guest experience.

CHALLENGE

The hotels are spread across wide reaches of the U.S. and Canada, from Texas and Florida in the south to Illinois, Ontario and New York. The company needed a VPN solution that would work with any locally based Internet service provider, centralize security to minimize the need for onsite IT talent, and allow hotel employees to focus on hospitality, not technology.

That meant a hardware-based solution. According to Brian Cornell, Vice President of Information Technology, “With a centrally managed hardware-based solution, that hardware is secured in a telecom room or closet. We don't want to worry about end users doing anything that would break their own connection.”

WATCHGUARD® SOLUTION

The company turned to WatchGuard® products to secure their distributed business desktops and critical back-office applications. Cornell deployed a Firebox® X Peak™ to protect the network operations center, and a Firebox X Edge at each of the fifty hotels. “WatchGuard has a vast product line,” he explains, “which means we can get the right level of hardware for each location. Not over-built, not under-built. And the management and practical user interface are all very similar from product to product.”

Thanks to the WatchGuard devices, Concord’s administrative business functions share the same Internet pipe that the hotel provides to its guests, even though the security needs are far different. Concord protects its guests via NAT and some simple filtering. “We don’t want to encumber our guests’ traffic unintentionally,” says Cornell. “We’re a hospitality company, and our goal is to create an environment for our guests where they feel like they are at home.” Meanwhile, the critical business desktops and applications receive the tight security provided by WatchGuard.

BENEFITS

Using the WatchGuard products and VPN capabilities, “We've constructed what I would refer to as an Internet distributed enterprise” says Cornell. “It empowers our IT department to respond quickly to technical support requests, and to manage our back-office applications efficiently.

“We love the WatchGuard products, because we can make the configurations as complex as we need them to be, to handle different routes, connectivity to certain devices, or custom policies and rules. But at the same time, they’re also very straightforward and easy to manage.”

Drag-and-Drop VPN Capability for Quick Scalability

Generally Concord adds a hotel to its network every three or four months. The WatchGuard drag-and-drop VPN capability allows them to create the secure connection in 60 seconds. “Using the WatchGuard interface, it's literally as easy as a drag-and-drop from one firewall onto another, and a VPN is constructed.”

“We also have pre-constructed templates for the firewall configuration depending on the style and class of hotel. When we bring on a new site, we drop in a template and it's done.”

Saving Time and Effort through Centrally Managed Security

The WatchGuard VPN network, unified threat management capabilities, and WatchGuard System Manager (WSM) software allow Cornell and his staff to remotely manage the firewalls, as well as security for all the remote desktops. “You name it, we centrally manage it,” he says. “If we want to make a change to a policy or configuration, we do that from here. And once we had the base level of understanding, firewall management is now so intuitive that it seems easy. With another solution, I know we'd be spending more time. With WatchGuard, it's plug-and-play and forget. It clearly pays for itself in ease of management.”

That makes Cornell's IT staff more productive. "The WatchGuard product line enables us to focus our labor on being proactive. It's a crux of dependability that we can rely on that does not cause issues in our hotels. We can focus on other items, minimize support issues, and free our front-line employees to serve the guests who ultimately pay our salaries."

A Solution for the Long Run

Cornell and Concord have long valued WatchGuard for its ability to make complex technology easy to implement. "We started using WatchGuard back in 1999, and we're still with them today. I consider us fortunate that we selected them, because we've had a good experience the entire time with the product line.

"You know that when you buy something, you're going to get a long run with that piece of hardware. They don't end-of-life their products prematurely. You also know when they encourage you to replace something, you really should be replacing it. It's been a good working relationship all around.

"We have a few companies like WatchGuard in our portfolio that we really enjoy doing business with. We don't foresee changing the relationship. Because they do their job so well."

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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. Our newest product line – the WatchGuard SSL – makes secure remote access easy and affordable, regardless of the size of your network. 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.

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