



Making the Case for Upgrading to Unified Threat Management

A case study in the evolution of network security

BACKGROUND

The Bible Baptist Church, founded in 1967 in Kissimmee, Florida, serves some 1,000 members throughout Ocala County. In 1972 the church opened its Heritage Christian School, which currently has 600 students. Together, the church and school employ a staff of 50.

The computer network at Bible Baptist was established 10 years ago. Today, it supports 35 desktops, plus additional laptops, that are used by teachers, secretaries, and other church personnel. Initially, a software-based firewall was used to protect the network against external threats and intrusion. In 2001, they decided to increase the level of perimeter defense by purchasing a WatchGuard® Firebox® hardware-based solution. At that time, the Firebox was used for its firewall and VPN capabilities, in conjunction with another vendor's anti-virus product. Unwanted email did not present the cumbersome problem it later became, and they decided to forego purchasing an anti-spam product.

CHALLENGE

The situation quickly began to change, and the church developed a significant spam problem that seriously interfered with the staff's productivity. Even with Exchange Server 2003's built in spam filter, some staff members were getting 200 to 300 spam emails per day. Aside from the drain on productivity and the potential threat to the network's security, there was an increasing issue of inappropriate content exposure, especially for a religious institution.

“People were begging me to solve the problem,” said Jimmy Estrella, the church’s network administrator. “Initially, I did not have a solution. I could only reassure them that they were not alone, as everyone was suffering from the same issue. As far as I knew, this was simply a problem that all email users unfortunately faced.”

WATCHGUARD® SOLUTION

The church had purchased its initial WatchGuard Firebox from Computer Consultants and Merchants, a consulting firm in Florida that holds their network service contract. After discussing the spam problem with Computer Consultants, Estrella learned that their existing firewall was nearing its end of life and should be considered for replacement. Estrella decided to invest in a new WatchGuard Firebox X750e firewall with the unified threat management (UTM) bundle of security subscriptions. The complementing security subscriptions provided comprehensive threat protection with powerful anti-virus, anti-spyware, anti-spam, intrusion prevention, and URL content filtering capabilities. “I saw this as a long-term investment,” said Estrella, “and truthfully, it was the best investment we’ve ever made. Now, I get smiles and compliments instead of complaints when I walk into the teacher’s lounge!”

Computer Consultants and Merchants assisted with the installation, which Estrella said went smoothly. “The new firewall worked a little differently from the old one in terms of getting our public IP addresses to point to our internal IP addresses, such as our FTP or web server. Once we learned to configure the ports of our network cables in order for them to assign local IP addresses, we were up and running.” Estrella said that once they discovered the model-to-model differences on how the IP addresses worked, he actually liked the new system better. “Now if we have to perform maintenance on our mail server, we can just unplug the cable with the knowledge that nobody will be trying to access it while we’re working.”

Once configured to their specifications, the installation of the new appliance was a matter of unplugging the network cables of the old firewall and plugging them into the new one. “We had approximately 30 seconds downtime,” said Estrella.

As soon as the new system was deployed, it immediately began identifying and blocking spam. “We were absolutely amazed by the amount of spam it was capturing,” said Estrella. “We didn’t realize that the volume was so significant.”

BENEFITS

The benefits realized by the Bible Baptist Church were numerous, but perhaps the most dramatic was the Firebox X750e UTM Bundle’s effectiveness at **blocking spam**. As a result, staff productivity has increased significantly, plus management has the peace of mind knowing that employees and students are no longer subjected to offensive material.

The numbers tell the story. Bible Baptist Church received 34,265 emails within a four day period. Of that number, the X750e blocked 30,812 – about 90% of the total volume – as spam, with another 57 emails appropriately flagged as suspect. Within the same four-day period, the staff received just 1,186 legitimate emails, along with 2,210 bulk emails (such as newsletters). “The Firebox is an intelligent system,” notes Estrella. “Users continued to receive their subscribed communications, without having to specifically white list them. I have yet to receive a complaint about a legitimate email being blocked.”

Another key benefit was the firewall's **anti-virus capabilities**: in the same four-day period, the X750e scanned 102,225 potentially harmful objects, finding and blocking 37 viruses – any one of which could have brought the network down.

As for **intrusion prevention**, in the same four-day period the firewall performed 3,634,138 scans, preventing 121 intrusions. "WatchGuard has really beefed up its intrusion prevention," said Estrella. "The X750e's capabilities are really powerful."

The X750e also provides **URL filtering**. "We primarily use this to help students stay focused on their work," says Estrella. "We block MySpace and about 50 other sites."

Church employees occasionally work from home, connecting to the network through a VPN connection. The X750e provides **VPN protection**, as well. "Knowing that our information is safe, even when it's being accessed remotely is another way in which the X750e gives us peace of mind," comments Estrella.

Estrella also appreciates the firewall's **easy-to-use user interface** and **comprehensive reporting features**, which allow him to view network usage at the user and user group level.

Last but not least, Estrella found the WatchGuard sales representatives to be very helpful and easy to work with. "I conveyed the requirements to our WatchGuard representatives, and they told me exactly which system would do the best job of meeting them," says Estrella. "Plus, they helped us save money! After the firewall had arrived, we conveyed that we weren't going to be able to install it for a month. They advised us not to register it until the day before we planned on installing it, which was very helpful."

Does Estrella think other schools can benefit from a WatchGuard firewall? "Absolutely," he said. "I'm the president of the Christian Conference, which has 24 member schools. When school administrators tell me they're having problems with spam or security issues, I simply tell them, "You don't have to put up with that. There is a solution – and it's available from WatchGuard."

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

ADDRESS:
505 Fifth Avenue South
Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98104

WEB:
www.watchguard.com

U.S. SALES:
1.800.734.9905

INTERNATIONAL SALES:
+1.206.613.0895

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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