



## Helping the Red Cross Keep Crisis at Bay

A Case Study in Network Security

*“Communication is the highest priority. We need to be able to keep lines of communication open during a disaster, as well as posting to our website so that people know that we’re in disaster mode. We can do that with the help of WatchGuard and PC Solutions.”* **Leslie Fransen, Human Resources Director, American Red Cross Twin Cities Chapter**

### **BACKGROUND**

The American Red Cross is a humanitarian organization run by volunteers, providing relief to victims of disaster and helping people prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergencies. The organization not only assists with disaster relief, but also offers services to the Armed Forces, emergency medical services, emergency social services, international services, community outreach programs, health and safety services such as CPR, water safety and nurse assistant training, and blood services.

The Twin Cities chapter employs 45 full-time and 81 part-time staff members. That number includes ten members of the Crisis Response Team; responsible for fielding emergency calls after regular business hours. Members of the Crisis Response Team work from their homes and deal with everything from child protection calls to international tracing of disaster victims. Every call that comes through is of utmost importance.

### **CHALLENGE**

Due to the type of service provided, the Twin Cities chapter of the Red Cross needed an incredibly reliable network infrastructure with an emphasis on failover, high availability, and secure VPN and VoIP functionality. Not only was it important that employees were able to conduct operations via VPN

from remote, disaster-stricken areas, but that day-to-day business needs were also addressed, including access to sensitive financial data and the institutions that handle them.

Also imperative was that the needs of the Crisis Response Team were met. Crisis Response Team members work from remote locations to field after-hours calls that are often times re-routed from 911. All volunteers use VoIP, so a solution that provided reliable connectivity and impeccable security was a high priority. Each call is treated with extreme privacy. Given the nature of the information exchanged there is no room for any security failures or dropped phone calls.

## **WATCHGUARD® SOLUTION**

When it came time to think about upgrading their network security solution, the Twin Cities chapter of the Red Cross looked to their long-standing Managed IT Services provider and WatchGuard partner, PC Solutions. The Red Cross has outsourced all of their network security and IT support to PC Solutions (PCS) and takes their recommendations very seriously. So, when PCS recommended upgrading their existing WatchGuard solution to one that could handle their changing needs, they didn't balk.

The Twin Cities chapter's previous solution had served them well but was lacking the bandwidth they needed to run a suite of security services and, most importantly, with only one box in place there was a single point of failure. Rick Adams, Vice President, PC Solutions explains, "They were looking for an appliance that could handle a lot of bandwidth while running the UTM Security Suite that includes WebBlocker, spamBlocker, and Gateway AntiVirus (GAV)/Intrusion Prevention Service (IPS), as well as providing load balancing and failover functionality." With failover and bandwidth being the highest priority, PC solutions suggested that they deploy two Firebox X Core 1250 e-Series appliances at their main office. "Given their previous success with WatchGuard products, the decision to upgrade was natural," says Adams.

The next challenge to tackle was securing the all-important Crisis Response Team. Leslie Fransen, Human Resources Director, American Red Cross Twin Cities Chapter, describes the situation, "Because of the sensitive nature of the information they receive, we have to make sure that the case work information is 100% secure." Sean Seamans, PCS Network Architect, and his colleagues recommended installing Firebox Edge X10e appliances at each volunteer's home, connecting them to the main office and protecting them from malicious threats while maintaining connectivity.

## **BENEFITS**

The most important thing for the Red Cross is being able to keep the organization up and running under any circumstance. With two Core X 1250e appliances protecting headquarters and the Edge devices in the field, they've been able to continue providing the stellar relief services the Red Cross is known for.

### **Day-to-Day Business in the Face of Disaster**

In order for the Red Cross to deliver aid to those in need, everything behind the scenes needs to run as smoothly as possible. The accounting staff needs to be able to access financial records and communicate with financial institutions even in the midst of an emergency. "We need to make sure that our accounting staff has access to our bank account and that all sensitive financial data is secure," explains Fransen "we need to maintain business as usual." With the WatchGuard appliances in place, employees can do their jobs from anywhere without having to worry about the security of sensitive financial data.

### **Constant Communication is Key**

The landscape of disaster relief work and emergency response is constantly changing and members of the

Red Cross need to be able to communicate effectively with one another and the public at all times. Fransen explains, “Communication is the highest priority. We need to be able to keep lines of communication open during a disaster, as well as posting to our website so that people know that we’re in disaster mode. We can do that with the help of WatchGuard and PC Solutions.”

### **Keeping Crisis Response Connected**

After business hours, 911 calls that aren’t traditionally handled by emergency response organizations are rerouted to the Red Cross Crisis Response Team. Volunteers handle a vast array of very important calls explains Fransen, “From five o’clock pm until morning those Crisis Response members are the Red Cross. People call in with child protection, fires, first calls for help – we also provide international tracing services for those concerned about loved ones abroad. They might be looking for someone in the military or a traveler in a disaster-stricken area; it is all a part of our safe and well program.”

The Twin Cities chapter uses VoIP to connect callers with their volunteers. To make sure that all members of the team have the best in VoIP reliability and security PC Solutions suggested that Firebox X Edge 10e appliances be installed at volunteers’ homes. “We wanted to assure that no call would be dropped and that the privacy of the calls would be guaranteed,” says Adams of PC Solutions. Fransen was happy to have PC Solutions work with the team, “From our standpoint, PC Solutions know us well and we have a lot of confidence in the way that they deploy and manage the WatchGuard appliances.”

With WatchGuard and PC Solutions providing a strong and secure network infrastructure, the Twin Cities chapter of the Red Cross can focus on what they do best – providing aid and relief to those in need.

#### **About PC Solutions, Inc.**

Founded in 1972, PC Solutions is one of the largest computer network support companies in the Twin Cities. Recognized as a leader in the Managed IT Services market, PC Solutions provides strategic IT planning, on-site network support, and remote help desk support in order to reduce downtime and help end users become more productive. To learn more about PC Solutions, visit [www.pcstechnology.com](http://www.pcstechnology.com), or call 763-852-1600.

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#### **ABOUT WATCHGUARD**

Since 1996, WatchGuard has been building award-winning unified threat management (UTM) network security solutions that combine firewall, VPN and security services to protect networks and the businesses they power. We recently launched the next generation: extensible threat management (XTM) solutions featuring reliable, all-in-one security, scaled and priced to meet the unique security needs of every enterprise. Our products are backed by 15000 partners representing WatchGuard in 120 countries. More than a half million signature red WatchGuard security appliances have already been deployed worldwide in industries including retail, education, and healthcare. WatchGuard is headquartered in Seattle, Washington, with offices throughout North America, Europe, Asia Pacific, and Latin America.

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