

CASE STUDY

Swedish Food Retail Group Prepares for Digital Transformation Through Fortinet Data Center Firewall Upgrade

Axfood was founded around the turn of the millennium as a family business with a simple idea—to source the best food products from the best wholesalers and retailers and present these to customers through the finest stores in Sweden.

After two decades as Sweden's second-largest food retailer, the group's vision is still the same—offering the nation a broad range of healthy, affordable, and sustainable food options delivered in the smoothest and most convenient way, whether in-store or online.

To this end, Axfood develops and operates a range of brands within the Swedish food retail market, each well-positioned to offer the best customer experience for its target group. Purchasing and logistics for all food concepts are conducted by a joint-group organization—a collaboration that promotes strength and efficiency.

In recent years, sustainability has become an increasingly important part of Axfood's vision, influencing the daily work of its 10,000+ employees across the country and informing every aspect of its operations across more than 1,200 stores.

Acknowledging the contribution to global carbon emissions from food production, Axfood is committed to both national and global sustainability initiatives aiming for climate neutrality by the end of the year.

Innovation Through Digital Transformation

Through the Hemköp brand, Axfood was Sweden's first food retailer to offer customers digital receipts and cardless loyalty club membership, and in 2020, the Hemköp Smartshopper app became the first proprietary, comprehensive solution for digital shopping in stores.

Such digital innovations are key to Axfood's continued success and so the group's IT networking and security infrastructure plays a critical role in shaping and safeguarding the company's future.

By 2019, it had become clear that although the group had so far avoided falling victim to any major security breach, their existing protection—particularly at the data center—was not keeping pace with the ever-evolving menace of cyber threats.

To safeguard the digital assets that now formed the lifeblood of the company's growing retail, logistics, and distribution operations, Axfood's IT team began searching for a new solution that would offer greater protection from the full range of advanced threats while providing the scalability and flexibility to support the group's high ambitions for continued growth and innovation.

Axfood had a wide range of applications and services to deliver, such as an SAP suite, and a multi-cloud environment with services in Amazon AWS and Microsoft Azure. Axfood needed a solution that could distinguish between data flows based



Axfood

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Details

Customer: Axfood

Industry: Food Retail

Location: Sweden

Business Impact

- Strong and evolving protection from the latest, most advanced threats
- Improved data throughput and application response times
- Greater control and visibility across all network traffic and threats
- Flexibility and performance to meet future requirements

on applications or user, apply prioritization and security policies, and provide the necessary high-throughput segmentation that would enable trusted application access with the required security inspection performance and threat protection.

Broad Protection With Dependable Performance

After drawing up a shortlist of solutions and evaluating them against current and future requirements, the team opted for Fortinet, deploying two FortiGate 2200E next-generation firewalls (NGFWs), FortiManager and FortiAnalyzer for central management, reporting, and analysis, and FortiSandbox for added protection from unknown threats.

“Based on pure next-generation firewall price performance, Fortinet is already a solid choice,” comments Mats Serneholt, technical area manager for Axfood, “but what really sets the Fortinet solution apart is the range of additional functionality you get right out of the box.

“We know that further down the line, when we enable more functions, such as SD-WAN [software-defined wide-area networking] and extend protection into the cloud through endpoint protection, etc., it’ll just require some simple configuration changes thanks to the breadth, depth, and simplicity of the Fortinet Security Fabric,” explains Serneholt.

With multiple high-speed interfaces, high port density, and high throughput enabled by security processing units (SPUs), the FortiGate 2200E delivers the performance and protection to prevent and detect against known attacks using continuous threat intelligence from artificial intelligence (AI)-powered FortiGuard Labs security services.

FortiGate purpose-built security processors deliver the industry’s best network performance as well as threat protection performance with ultralow latency—even for secure sockets layer (SSL) encrypted traffic—and was the first to add TLS 1.3 deep inspection capabilities to allow a mixed environment that can run TLS 1.2 and TLS 1.3 concurrently.

“With Fortinet, you don’t have to worry about throughput,” adds Serneholt, “you just enable the functionality you need, knowing that performance will take care of itself.”

To proactively detect previously unknown sophisticated attacks in real time, FortiSandbox uses a two-step AI-based approach. First, known and emerging malware is quickly identified through AI-powered static analysis. Second, within a contained environment, the full attack life cycle can be uncovered using behavior-based AI that constantly learns and adapts to new malware techniques. The combination of both static and dynamic detection makes FortiSandbox more efficient and effective against the most advanced unknown threats.

FortiManager provides Axfood with sophisticated centralized management and deep insight into network traffic and threats through a single pane of glass. Coupled with FortiAnalyzer for centralized logging, reporting, and analysis, Serneholt and his team now have full control and visibility over the entire infrastructure. The result is less time spent firefighting and more time optimizing and planning for the future.

Solutions

- FortiGate
- FortiManager
- FortiAnalyzer
- FortiSandbox
- Enterprise Advanced Support Services

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To facilitate the deployment and ensure timely responses through a focused communication channel, Axfood also opted for the “Business” level of Fortinet advanced services, in which a designated engineer is appointed, able to become familiar with the customer’s specific environment and assist in regular ticket reviews. The objective is to keep operations running while managing internal and external risks to avoid disruptions.

Future Evolution

As Axfood’s business continues to evolve and expand, Serneholt and the team plans to further simplify and streamline operations with a possible move to an SD-WAN architecture. With FortiGate’s integrated SD-WAN capabilities and the option of zero-touch deployment through FortiManager, such a transition to SD-WAN could enable the group to smoothly replace existing, costly lines based on multiprotocol label switching (MPLS) with lower-cost broadband connections, gaining simplified management and enhanced performance at a lower cost without sacrificing user experience.

Through the unifying integration of the Fortinet Security Fabric that effectively transforms multiple security components into a seamless, collaborative cybersecurity platform that protects the entire attack surface, Axfood will be able to make this and other transitions, safe in the knowledge that no security gaps will emerge from the changing topology and attack profile.



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