

Fortinet Switches into NAC

News

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Fortinet Inc, known primarily as an unified threat management appliance vendor, will today unveil its take on the network access control space, releasing a UTM-switch device aimed at remote and branch offices.

Based on the notion that NAC is "a feature, not a market", the company has bundled all of its UTM functionality into a 24-port switch, and added the ability for it to quarantine computers if they start triggering security events. It's Fortinet's first switch.

The device is called the FortiGate-224B. There is no accompanying agent software, which is often a feature of NAC-like products. Rather, endpoint security policy compliance is measured by browser-based applets that can be loaded when quarantined machines try to access the web.

NAC, an idea kicked off by Cisco Systems Inc three years ago, has been embraced by pretty much every major security vendor out there, whether they sell network products or endpoint software.

The idea, in essence, is to enforce security by making sure endpoints comply with security policies before they get a chance to spread malware around a network. This may mean making sure antivirus software is up-to-date or that Windows is fully-patched, for examples.

However, there's a growing realization that enforcing policy at the moment a computer connects and tries to get a network address may not be enough, or even that useful.

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"NAC as Cisco defines is a lot about the endpoint's state," said Fortinet's chief marketing officer, Richard Stiennon. "But it's not a threat not to have updated signatures. If every time a CEO logs on he is reminded to get updated signatures, he is going to get a little bit annoyed."

Fortinet's preferred deployment mode is therefore to assume compliance, and to only start quarantining endpoints to remediation VLANs when they start to exhibit risky behavior, like producing worm traffic or sending spam. A "strict" mode, which is more NAC-like, can also be enforced, he said.

The devices start at \$3,995 and contain all the usual functionality of FortiGate appliances -- firewall/VPN, anti-spam, anti-virus, anti-spyware, intrusion prevention, and web content filtering. Some features requires added subscription fees.