

CASE STUDY

Midwestern MSSP Grows its Security Business With Help From the Fortinet Security Fabric

Avid Communications was founded in 2006 with the mission of helping small and midsize businesses (SMBs) migrate to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephony. The company has since diversified into business internet, network security, Wi-Fi, and cloud managed services, which it offers to businesses across the U.S. Midwest. The company is also a Google Fiber Tech Partner and has been instrumental in bringing gigabit broadband to the region.

Addressing SMBs' Unmet Needs

In the years before Avid Communications moved into cybersecurity services, it identified an unmet need in its customers' businesses. Tim Campbell, the company's CISO, explains, "Customers would ask for our help with their firewalls, and we discovered that many businesses were buying expensive next-generation firewalls (NGFWs), but not enabling the valuable features for which they had paid. These unmanaged devices were going to waste, and our customers' businesses were not as secure as they thought them to be."

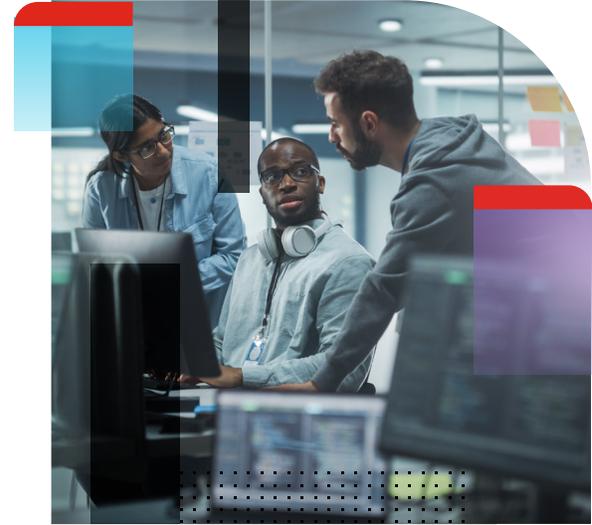
Matthew Sutton, director of cybersecurity operations at Avid Communications, adds, "We managed customers' firewalls free of charge for several years, but given the uptick in security threats and the growing sophistication of security technology, we realized that a dedicated managed service would be of huge benefit to them."

Avid Communications' customers are typically the stores and offices that are the heart of Main Street USA. The people who own and run these businesses are not cybersecurity or IT experts, yet they must protect themselves against a challenging threat landscape. As Sutton says, "Avid Communications' goal is to make it easier for our customers to focus on what they do best. Along with a cybersecurity solution, we needed to create a service that could take care of everything for our customers."

As Avid Communications set out building a best-in-class security service, Campbell and his team understood that it could in no way impede the speed and performance of customers' networks. "Kansas City is unusual in that we have access to Google Fiber." Campbell continues, "Our customers expect gigabit speeds, and do not take kindly to a service that reduces that speed."

A Best-in-Class Service

Having decided to offer a Firewall-as-a-Service (FWaaS) to its customers, Avid Communications conducted a market evaluation. "We put all the major firewall vendors on a matrix and evaluated them against our customers' requirements," says Campbell. "Fortinet really stood out. The FortiGate NGFWs comes with secure sockets layer virtual private network (SSL VPN) as standard, and no competitor could come close in terms of performance and cost. It was an easy choice for us to partner with Fortinet."



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Avid Communications

Details

Customer: Avid Communications

Industry: MSSP/Service Provider

Location: Kansas City, MO

Secure SD-WAN locations: 30

Endpoints Managed: 650

Business Impact

- Meets demand for high-performing secure networks enabling the company to win business
- Ability to keep headcount and prices low in keeping with business model
- Centralized management for rapid deployment to new customers

Today, Avid Communications offers a comprehensive managed security service for SMB customers on the Fortinet Security Fabric. The FortiGate NGFWs, which are the core solution for protecting customers' network edges, are supported by the FortiSIEM security information and event management solution, which helps Avid Communications analyze customers' event data in real time to discover potential breaches and attacks. All FortiGate NGFWs are enabled for Fortinet Secure software-defined wide-area network (SD-WAN), which customers can activate on request. The Secure SD-WAN capability is natively available in the same FortiOS running on FortiGate NGFWs and helps businesses realize a superior quality of experience.

Recently, the company also integrated Fortinet's endpoint detection and response solution, FortiEDR, which it is currently using to protect 650 endpoints across approximately 40 organizations. This is supported by FortiClient, which provides integrated visibility and control as well as enabling two-factor authentication (2FA), for which Avid Communications uses Fortinet FortiTokens.

Finally, the company also uses FortiManager, a single pane of glass through which the company can configure and manage its entire fleet of devices.

Delivering Speed and Performance for Customers

The Fortinet Security Fabric enables Avid Communications to provide a feature-rich set of security services to its customers, without affecting their network speeds or performance, and at an acceptable cost. "That's really important," Sutton says, "as the speed and performance reports are often where deals are won or lost. To that extent, Fortinet is an important part of us being able to grow our security business."

The high levels of integration that come with the Fortinet Security Fabric along with simple, highly automated, and centralized device management and configuration, mean that Avid Communications can extend its product portfolio while retaining a lean operation. "We know that all of Fortinet's products will do what we need them to and deliver when required. That is important because predictability allows us to keep our headcount low," says Sutton.

The usability and seamless integration of Fortinet's solutions mean that Avid Communications can accelerate the pace of its business. Campbell and his team can deploy to new customers rapidly, leveraging configuration templates to reduce the time-to-value for end users and improve the service they offer. With just one integrated set of products and one technical competency to deal with, the company can be agile and support customer requirements at pace.

"The Fortinet Security Fabric is a significant benefit for our business," explains Campbell. "We only deal with one vendor for the different elements of the service we offer customers, which saves on work. That helps us keep our price point at a place suitable for our market."

Enterprise-grade Security

Another benefit of working with Fortinet is that Avid Communications can help its customers leverage enterprise-grade technology. As Sutton explains, "Typically, high-end products like FortiEDR come with a minimum seat requirement that puts them out of reach for smaller businesses. However, because of our relationship with Fortinet across numerous businesses we can spread these seats out. That means a small Main Street operation is now protected by the same EDR capabilities as some of the world's biggest corporations."

Business Impact (cont.)

- Seamless integration with Fortinet and third-party systems to meet varying customer needs
- 650 endpoints protected with FortiEDR across around 40 organizations

Solutions

- FortiGate Next-Generation Firewall
- Fortinet Secure SD-WAN
- FortiManager
- FortiSIEM
- FortiEDR
- FortiClient
- FortiToken
- FortiCare Support Services

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- Tim Campbell, CISO, Chief Technologist, Avid Communications

Thanks to the FortiGate NGFWs, Avid Communications is also able to help SMBs in regulated industries meet their compliance objectives. “Doctors, medical offices, financial services firms, and others need to be able to demonstrate that they are protecting data with sufficient rigor. With the FortiGate NGFWs we can help manage that for our customers. The results have been great, with auditors satisfied with the capabilities of the FortiGate devices,” says Sutton.

Avid Communications’ customers that chose to enable the Fortinet Secure SD-WAN can benefit from unprecedented levels of uptime. Prolonged periods of downtime are lethal for small businesses both in terms of direct costs through lost sales and reputational damage. The SD-WAN capability enabled through the FortiGates provides redundancy and resiliency for Avid Communication’s customers.

Finally, Fortinet’s ability to integrate easily with third-party solutions has also been important. “We are constantly being asked to integrate with one-off, customer-specific solutions, or, in retail, with point-of-sale (POS) systems,” says Campbell. “With Fortinet, we only need to identify the customer requirements and then build them into the FortiGate NGFWs. Over the years, we have found that no matter the ask, the FortiGate NGFWs have always had the flexibility needed right there in the feature set—and we have carried out some complex integrations in our time.”

First-class Support From a Trusted Partner

Over the years of working with Fortinet, Avid Communications has come to appreciate the high levels of technical support that its partner provides them. As Sutton says, “We have been extremely happy with FortiCare Support Services. They troubleshoot any issues we have rapidly and always give us what we need to work through them.”

Avid Communications also relies heavily on the training support provided by Fortinet. Campbell encourages all the company’s engineers to attend the Fortinet Network Security Expert (NSE) program to obtain NSE certifications. Campbell comments, “Through the training and our daily work, we have built a deep relationship with Fortinet. We know we can lean on Fortinet to resolve problems for us immediately and help ensure that we provide our customers with the best possible service. That is a true partnership.”

Future Plans

Avid Communications is pursuing a Fortinet-first strategy for its future needs. The company is planning to ramp up sales and is targeting 30-40 FortiGate customer acquisitions per month. Campbell concludes, “We believe there is a strong market out there and with Fortinet’s world-class solution we are perfectly placed to deliver the critical security solutions that our clients require. We look forward to our continued partnership in the years ahead.”

