

CASE STUDY

Popular Texan Barbecue Restaurant Chain Enhances Email Protection With FortiMail

Bill Miller Bar-B-Q is a popular Texan restaurant chain that specializes in barbecued foods. Headquartered in San Antonio, the company runs 82 restaurants statewide, which it services through a commissary kitchen. The commissary model means that Bill Miller Bar-B-Q can always offer a consistent dining experience to customers across its locations while reducing any waste.

Founded in 1953, Bill Miller Bar-B-Q's heritage is a source of pride to the company. Many of its thousands-strong workforce have been on the payroll between 20 and 40 years, time well spent on delivering a great customer experience. "Our workforce is second-to-none," says Robert Collazo, director of information technology at Bill Miller Bar-B-Q. "But they are not IT professionals. Their job is to run the best barbecue restaurants possible and keep our customers happy. They cannot be expected to stay on top of the latest security trends, nor always know which emails are legitimate and which are fraudulent, especially when the threats can be so convincing."

In recent months, Bill Miller Bar-B-Q has seen an uptick in phishing emails sent to employees, particularly spear-phishing attacks, which target specific groups and individuals within the company. The increase in email-based attacks comes as the company is doubling the number of employees with access to email inboxes. "We had switched to a new email provider, Microsoft 365, which made it cost-effective for us to add users. By giving all our managers email accounts, we can now better maintain communications consistently during shift changes. Given that we operate 364 days of the year, this is a clear advantage. But, it also means we must double down on email security."

Collazo's team was already using the email platform's native security controls. However, these controls did not provide the required depth of inspection. He also admits that training employees not to take certain actions is always an ongoing challenge. "The native filters work, but they send phishing emails to a junk folder," Collazo explains. "The problem is that some employees then go into their junk folder, and if the mail is convincing enough, they may believe the email has been incorrectly filed and then click on a malicious link or attachment, which could include ransomware. We were looking for a system that could catch all phishing emails and stop them in their tracks."

Advanced, Multilayer Protection From Fortinet

In early 2020, Bill Miller Bar-B-Q reached out to Fortinet to consider implementing its FortiMail Cloud email security as-a-service solution. "We had been talking to Fortinet about a potential data center project, and so it made sense to see what its email solution could do. The demo was impressive and convinced us to go ahead and deploy the product," comments Collazo.

FortiMail Cloud delivers comprehensive, multilayer threat protection designed to counter sophisticated multivector attacks and is routinely marked as best-in-class by independent testing firms. Bill Miller Bar-B-Q is in the process of deploying the FortiMail Cloud solution across 247 inboxes owned by store managers and back-office personnel. Already deployed in 120 mailboxes, the company is now rolling out the final 127 FortiMail-secured mailboxes.



"The threat landscape is getting more challenging, and we need to ensure we have the best defenses available. Partners like Fortinet are integral to helping ensure we keep our business secure while freeing our people to do what they do best—provide great customer service."

– Robert Collazo, Director of Information Technology, Bill Miller Bar-B-Q

Details

Customer: Bill Miller Bar-B-Q

Industry: Hospitality/Retail

Location: San Antonio, TX

Business Impact

- Improved ability to defend against spear phishing attacks
- Rapid decrease in recipient spam, with 40% cut off at source

Greater Levels of Control

With the FortiMail Cloud rollout well underway, Bill Miller Bar-B-Q is realizing significant benefits. Most importantly from a security perspective, the company shored up its antivirus and spam protection and implemented a more robust response to spear-phishing attacks utilizing advanced sender verification schemes, leveraging cloud sandboxing for advanced analysis of potentially malicious file attachments and links, and impersonation analysis techniques.

“With FortiMail Cloud, the system automatically interrogates the email addresses of senders. So, if a spear phisher attempts to spoof the address of a named individual at the company, the system detects the fraud right away and stops that email from coming anywhere near our employees’ inboxes. With FortiMail Cloud we are able to address the spear-phishing threat at the source, rather than having to rely on employees following best practice,” says Collazo.

In just the first week of implementing FortiMail Cloud, Collazo noted a significant drop-off in recipient spam, with FortiMail excluding around 40% of such emails.

Optimizing the System

As Bill Miller Bar-B-Q’s IT team learns more about the FortiMail Cloud solution, it continues to discover new functions and features that will help improve its security posture.

Tyler Wilber, network administrator at Bill Miller Bar-B-Q, explains: “FortiMail Cloud provides a depth of features that we had not expected, and Fortinet has helped us fine-tune the system so that it is operating optimally. Throughout this process, Fortinet’s support team has been exceptionally responsive, and they are more than happy to help—whatever the ask—whether that is helping me set up a filter, or even just investigating whether a message is spam or not. We have been able to use the Fortinet support team as an extension of our own team to help with configuration and optimization of FortiMail Cloud and, ultimately, provide enhanced security that protects our organization and employees.”

While Bill Miller Bar-B-Q has called on Fortinet’s support team to help make the most of the system, they have not experienced any FortiMail Cloud issues that require support. Wilber, who as network administrator is the chief user of FortiMail Cloud, has found the system simple to use and its automated functions have helped him save time in his working day. “I do not have to interact with the system much, perhaps just three hours a month. With FortiMail Cloud, I can ‘set and forget,’ knowing that it is doing the job required.”

The time savings enabled by FortiMail are particularly important for Bill Miller Bar-B-Q because it has a relatively small IT team of just 11 people, and only two of those focus on networking and security. “FortiMail works from every perspective: It is low cost, easy to use, and most importantly it stops all the spam and threats we need it to,” adds Collazo.

Future Plans

Having experienced the capabilities Fortinet can offer, Bill Miller Bar-B-Q is now considering expanding the relationship into new areas, with an eye on the FortiEDR (endpoint detection and response) and FortiSIEM (security information and event management) offerings. Collazo concludes: “The threat landscape is getting more challenging, and we need to ensure we have the best defenses available. Partners like Fortinet are integral to helping ensure we keep our business secure while freeing our people to do what they do best—provide great customer service.”

Business Impact (contd.)

- Employees enabled to focus on core customer service roles
- Time saved for IT team thanks to automated security capabilities

Solution

- FortiMail Cloud

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– Tyler Wilber, Network Administrator, Bill Miller Bar-B-Q



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