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Brazilian Cooperative in Agribusiness, Livestock, and Retail Modernizes Its Network Infrastructure With Fortinet LAN Edge and Secure SD-WAN

Since 1957, Cotripal Agropecuária Cooperativa (Cotripal) has positioned itself as one of the most important agricultural cooperatives in the northwestern region of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. In its early days, the cooperative had only 29 farmers; it now has more than 5,000 members in 13 cities. As part of its growth, Cotripal invested in the retail business. It currently has more than 2,540 employees and 45 branch locations, including pharmacies, supermarkets, farm stores, and gas stations.

Cotripal's business grew rapidly in recent years. While it took 60 years to reach US$1 billion in revenue, it took just another three years to reach an impressive US$2.5 billion. This exceptional growth required the organization to undergo a digital transformation focused on digitization, networking, and security.

The organization began looking for a vendor that could provide a reliable networking solution that also offered robust security. "We started this search with security as a priority. While we certainly needed hardware, it must have built-in security as an essential component. We chose Fortinet because security is their core value. This is the company that can guarantee protection and performance," says Diego Boelter, Cotripal's innovation manager.

Optimized Network Infrastructure

Even before moving to Fortinet, it was obvious to Cotripal's IT team that its legacy infrastructure could not keep up with the cooperative's growth. Cotripal sometimes opens up to six new branches in a few months. The existing infrastructure would have struggled to support the requirements of so many new branches. Furthermore, maintenance, routing, and deployment of new locations had to be done manually. Opening a new branch requires the simultaneous deployment of complex equipment, setup, and configurations.

The organization also lacked centralized management of its network infrastructure, which added complexity and generated connectivity problems. Stores sometimes lost network connections, preventing farmers from selling their products or making it impossible for a store to carry out online transactions such as credit card payments or electronic transfers. Likewise, visitors to the stores experienced slow internet connectivity. Cotripal's board of directors wanted to change this and build a more digitally inclusive environment. They envisioned providing reliable and secure connectivity to Cotripal's branches to better serve its growing customer base.

To solve all these challenges and meet its aspirations, Cotripal had the advice and support of Integrasul, Fortinet's local partner, and deployed FortiGate Next-Generation Firewalls (NGFWs) to protect and link all of its stores into a unified, secure network. The cooperative also relied on FortiSwitch secure Ethernet

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Details

Customer: Cotripal Agropecuária Cooperativa

Industry: Agribusiness/Retail

Location: Brazil

Number of sites: 45

Business Impact

- Complete visibility of nearly 3,000 network devices

- Secure and stable connectivity between Cotripal's 45 locations

- Standardized the process for opening new locations quickly and easily

- Fast and secure connection for customers visiting the branch locations

switches to increase network connections while maintaining FortiGate security policies. This was made possible by the Fortinet Security Fabric platform, which intelligently connects all solutions.

The IT team also gained complete visibility into the more than 3,000 network devices deployed at all locations thanks to FortiManager, a tool that enables the team to manage and monitor the entire network. FortiManager provides real-time information on connection stability and network health. If an unusual event occurs, the company can see where it is and make quick and accurate decisions—something that was not possible prior to Fortinet.

For people at the branches, connectivity is no longer an issue. Cotripal has stable and secure connectivity at its 45 locations with the Fortinet Secure SD-WAN solution. And rather than manually reconfiguring its three internet links to restore connectivity, Cotripal's IT team now relies on the system to automatically switch to the active link to ensure zero interruptions. The solution also prioritizes network traffic to the appropriate locations, eliminating lag and bandwidth issues. "With Fortinet Secure SD-WAN, we can control everything from one place, and it has totally simplified our network infrastructure," says Boelter.

Additionally, Fortinet creates an improved experience for customers or associates who connect via Wi-Fi from any of Cotripal's branches. Fortinet's LAN Edge solution, consisting of around 600 FortiAP access points that work in an integrated way with the FortiGate NGFWs to create an SD-Branch architecture, enables visitors to have fast and secure access to the intranet, the business applications, and external internet sites.

Solutions

- FortiGate Next-Generation Firewall
- Fortinet Secure SD-WAN
- FortiAP
- FortiManager
- FortiAnalyzer
- FortiToken
- FortiSwitch

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At the heart of Cotripal's security solution is the FortiAnalyzer tool. With it, Cotripal now has real-time incident logging and reporting, enabling Cotripal to take instant action against any current threats. The company also uses encryption on the VPN links that connect its branches. Previously, the IT team had to actively monitor the network for potential security breaches. Any incident would only be found a few minutes after it happened, leaving a significant amount of information compromised. With the Fortinet platform, all network traffic is encrypted and secured via VPN, removing the risk of data leaks. Cotripal also uses FortiToken to further enhance VPN access security through the use of multi-factor authentication (MFA). Because the corporation handles about 16,000 transactions per minute, security is a priority for Cotripal.

A Network Ready for Business Growth

Fortinet's consolidation of the entire network infrastructure, security, and its management on a single platform allows Cotripal to work in a flexible, agile, and secure environment. With centralized management, the whole configuration process to open a new office is quick and simple, unlike in the past.

By counting on the ongoing support of Integrasul and Fortinet, Cotripal has peace of mind that its technological modernization is performed safely and efficiently. "We needed a digital transformation, but we wanted to do it with a 100% secure model. That is why we chose Fortinet," emphasizes Boelter.

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