



CASE STUDY

Grupo Universal Integrates Communications and Security with Secure SD-WAN



Grupo Universal is one of the main conglomerates in the Dominican Republic, made up of 10 subsidiaries offering solutions for insurance, financial, and other services organizations. With 55 years of experience, Grupo Universal operates under the core values of integrity, commitment, reliability, empathy, and transparency. The organization is also known for its leadership in innovation, generating value to different interest groups and Dominican communities through products and services, participation in new industry sectors, and good business practices.

Secure Technological and Digital Transformation

IT security and IT infrastructure availability are essential to Grupo Universal. The company has diversified in such a way that its vast business portfolio includes everything from insurance, trusts, and investment funds to assistance services, import of vehicle parts and accessories, auto repair, and its most recent venture, the first insurtech company in the country and the Caribbean.

In 2017, the company launched one of its most important projects since its foundation in 1964: its technological and digital transformation.

“As a group, we’re going through a very interesting process. In 55 years, the company grew to such an extent that we evolved from being an insurance agency to a holding company with 10 subsidiaries, requiring a quicker response to business demands. For this reason, we set out on a highly ambitious technological and digital transformation project consisting of 144 initiatives to overcome current challenges,” comments Eduardo Rojas, VP of technology at Grupo Universal.

Given the new technological demands of today’s digital economy, storing data in centralized architectures limits employee access and user response. Grupo Universal’s IT teams recognized the risks of a centralized database and decided to evolve into a wireless connection model, which in spite of also presenting some challenges, allowed the company to meet customer and internal users’ network security demands.

“In a fast-changing environment, we’re constantly reinventing ourselves. Our project involved the entire organization to ensure the technological and digital transformation of every aspect of our operation, using cutting-edge technology to improve processes and optimize our product and service delivery to customers. It’s the catalyst for change in the organization,” adds Rojas.

“The shift from a communications infrastructure to Fortinet solutions was key for us. We achieved centralized management that provides greater control over each of our branch locations. The integrated Security Fabric has also helped improve external and internal cyberattack detection within our infrastructure. Single-pane-of-glass management has unified our patch management and helps manage FortiGate appliances. In addition, we have optimized bandwidth thanks to Secure SD-WAN, which has saved us \$70,000 per year.”

– Miguel Raúl González,
IT Operations Management Director
at Grupo Universal

Details

Customer: Grupo Universal

Industry: Financial Services

Location: Dominican Republic

To help with the decentralized infrastructure project, Grupo Universal chose to partner with Fortinet.

“In Fortinet, we found solutions that allowed us to coordinate network expansion, management, and control through the Fortinet Secure SD-WAN across office locations,” says Andres M. Heredia Guerrero, architecture and innovation director at Grupo Universal. “With Fortinet solutions, we were able to take on one of our main challenges: WAN decentralization, which meant moving from a completely centralized network at our headquarters to a series of teams, enabling autonomy for each of our offices throughout the country. All of this with the peace of mind of knowing how to connect, what our network availability was going to be like and, finally, how we could now eliminate our dependence on the central tower as the communications hub and thus reduce costs.”

Centralized Management and Integrated Solutions

In order to reduce the administrative complexity for operational teams, Grupo Universal proposed having centralized management that would reduce risks and maintain an updated communications infrastructure.

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Through the integration of Fortinet Secure SD-WAN with other Security Fabric solutions, Grupo Universal was able to deploy a high-performance communications infrastructure and end-to-end security. Management and analytics solutions such as FortiManager and FortiAnalyzer delivered complete visibility with a single pane of glass and centralized policy management.

Meanwhile, FortiNAC network access control provides full visibility of all devices on the network, allowing for complete control of the level of access given per device, and FortiClient delivers advanced, proactive endpoint protection from zero-day threats. It seamlessly integrates with FortiSandbox for advanced threat detection.

Secure email gateway FortiMail protects cloud-based email services from advanced email threats to keep users and data secure. With the FortiWeb web application firewall, Grupo Universal was able to safely access cloud-based, business-critical applications. Adding FortiAP across the organization tied everything together, and ensured secure wireless access for devices for branch offices.

“Carrying out proof of concepts for each Fortinet solution was a decisive factor in the project’s implementation. The results for equipment performance and cost-effectiveness ultimately convinced us Fortinet was the right partner. Since the implementation of Fortinet solutions, we have recorded savings of \$30,000 per year in communication links. Further, we have reduced support tickets and improved network performance,” adds González.

Business Impact

- Improved performance and communications speeds with redundant links across all locations
- Cost savings of \$30,000 per year in communication links
- Cost savings of \$70,000 per year in WAN optimization
- Faster cloud access and cloud-hosted applications with local breakouts
- Secure access for devices and applications
- Integrated, consistent enforcement of business and security policies in headquarters and branch offices
- Simplified communications and security management
- Centralized alerts and alarms for risk management and response
- Improved network performance monitoring

Solutions

- FortiGate
- Fortinet Secure SD-WAN
- FortiManager
- FortiAnalyzer
- FortiNAC
- FortiSandbox
- FortiSwitch
- FortiWeb
- FortiMail
- FortiAP
- FortiClient Fabric Agent

Working Hand in Hand with the Client

To ensure they met compliance requirements and the expectations of Grupo Universal's IT team, Fortinet's Dominican Republic team worked closely with IT throughout the entire process.

According to Grupo Universal IT managers, the staff training provided was also crucial to the project's success. The company decided to also invest in training to provide their teams with access to the cybersecurity courses and certifications Fortinet offers its clients.

Through this project, Grupo Universal not only appropriately scaled their communications and IT infrastructure, centralized administration, and improved control management and risk response, but they also managed to reduce costs and increase network availability to 99.9%. With Fortinet's support, Grupo Universal was able to effectively integrate its communications and security in its technological and digital transformation process.

"The knowledge and support provided by Fortinet's technical team during the process allowed us to achieve a decentralized WAN with the independent communication we were looking for, improve internet access for our cloud-based services, and restructure our communications environment to include our most crucial offices. Fortinet's local support has been a great added value. We were able to test all the solutions in their portfolio. Fortinet truly became a business ally."

– *Andres M. Heredia Guerrero,
Architecture and Innovation
Director at Grupo Universal*

