



CASE STUDY

Major Dental Support Organization Enjoys Enhanced Protection with a Lowered Total Cost of Ownership



Heartland Dental is the largest dental support organization in the United States, providing comprehensive, nonclinical administrative, accounting, and marketing services to dental offices nationwide. The company supports over 1,000 dentists in more than 750 offices. In addition to business support services, Heartland Dental offers its members collaboration and coaching, including peer-to-peer knowledge sharing.

An Inefficient Legacy System

Heartland Dental has always placed an emphasis on ensuring the security of its widespread IT infrastructure. The company had originally deployed firewalls from a high-profile manufacturer, but device management capabilities and the feature set it delivered were not keeping pace with Heartland Dental's rapidly evolving requirements. Ross Petty, senior network security engineer for Heartland Dental, recalls, "It was possible to interrogate an individual computer in a specific dental office but very challenging to efficiently achieve this visibility across the entire network."

Heartland Dental has been extremely successful for a number of years, but the continuous expansion had exacerbated several inherent limitations in its infrastructure. Its IT department launched a project to improve cross-infrastructure monitoring, ease administration, and elevate its overall security posture. A proof of concept (POC) was constructed to evaluate potential new solutions, and multiple vendors were invited to participate.

A comprehensive set of criteria was created to gauge the capabilities of POC participants, including execution against an extensive number of threat management functionalities and reporting requirements. The IT team quickly settled on Fortinet: "The other vendors simply couldn't do what Fortinet could," notes Petty. "We knew that protecting our diverse attack surface would require a multi-product solution and were particularly impressed by the cohesion of the Fortinet Security Fabric architecture." Based on the POC performance, Heartland Dental began the phased implementation of a broad suite of Fortinet products.

Ease of Installation and Deployment

The FortiGate enterprise firewall appliance with Fortinet Security Fabric was the first model selected to replace legacy hardware in dental offices, immediately providing flexible visibility into suspicious activities across the entire Heartland Dental environment—something that was previously impossible. The FortiGate's intuitive interface made the deployment very straightforward, without any need for special instruction or training. A combination of FortiAP 223C access points and the wireless-enabled FortiWiFi 3G4G were chosen for many satellite offices, delivering redundant internet capabilities to remote locations that, in multiple instances, provided better connectivity than many clients' existing internet throughput speeds.

"Fortinet has delivered a tightly coordinated security strategy that gives us elevated protection, control and visibility across our entire infrastructure. In turn, we've been able to pass these benefits on to our own clients: Everyone wins!"

– Ross Petty, Senior Network Security Engineer, Heartland Dental

Details

Customer: Heartland Dental

Industry: Business Services

Location: Effingham, Illinois

Heartland Dental also installed the FortiSandbox advanced threat-detection system to evaluate suspicious code and URLs in a separate, self-contained, secure environment. “We utilize a hub and spoke architecture, so if malware tries to spread anywhere across the network the FortiSandbox immediately picks it up and quickly blocks the threat before any damage can occur,” explains Petty.

Prestaging equipment is a valued service offered to its clients by Heartland Dental. Hardware is initially shipped to the company’s main office, where it is preloaded with software, configured, and connected to the virtual private network (VPN). Just prior to being shipped to a dental office, devices are registered with the FortiManager security management system, and FortiDeploy is utilized to enable the rapid capture of serial numbers and device configurations with minimal human intervention.

“We try to ensure that any solution we implement can be scaled, for the purpose of simplicity and ease of management,” comments Petty. “However, it’s pretty common for locally supported offices to use a variety of proprietary applications that we don’t support, but the FortiGate’s flexibility makes this really easy to accommodate.”

The robust reporting and troubleshooting capabilities of FortiAnalyzer further enhance visibility and governance throughout the Heartland Dental environment. The appliance facilitates logging, reporting, and analysis of suspected threats as soon as they arise. Visibility is provided at a meta level, with the ability to immediately drill down to an individual device, application, or IP address.

Cost-effective with Improved Performance

Onsite testing also revealed that the wireless capabilities of the FortiWiFi 3G4G appliances were superior to the units they replaced, removing the frequent need to add more hardware to achieve satisfactory connectivity and throughput. The FortiWiFi’s inherent flexibility has supported the conversion of all VPNs from static to dynamic routing—with automated failover steering—enabling Heartland Dental to improve the level of service it provides to supported offices with enhanced resiliency and fault tolerance.

Heartland Dental has standardized on the FortiGate 60E—with hundreds of units deployed in a wide variety of office environments, most requiring nominal configuration changes prior to installation. The highly flexible FortiAP gives clients the ability to add secure wireless access points that seamlessly integrate with the FortiGate 60E, dramatically simplifying both deployment and ongoing management when compared with point solutions from other vendors. FortiManager has reduced overhead significantly by enabling configuration changes to be centrally disseminated rather than dictating that changes are made to each firewall individually.

Replacement of the legacy firewalls has yielded enhanced performance at a lower cost. “The entire suite of Fortinet solutions has dramatically reduced our total cost of ownership when I compare it to our previous vendor,” states Petty. “We have lowered costs and with better performance and protection.”

Leveraging the Fortinet Security Fabric, the multiple Fortinet products deployed by Heartland Dental provide a tightly integrated solution that addresses the diverse challenges of the organization’s widely distributed infrastructure. The inherent scalability, cross-collaboration, and centralized oversight shared across the Security Fabric ensure that the company can continue to securely achieve its business goals.

Petty concludes, “The Fortinet Security Fabric delivers a tightly coordinated security strategy that gives us elevated protection, governance, and visibility across our entire infrastructure. In turn, we’ve been able to pass these benefits on to the offices we support; everyone wins!”

Business Impact

- Improved resource utilization and quality of coverage with cross-enterprise visibility
- Lowered total cost of ownership, combined with enhanced service levels and security
- Streamlined deployment process and diminished potential for errors
- Centralized management, decreased staffing requirements, and increased control

Solutions

- FortiGate
- FortiWiFi
- FortiAP
- FortiManager
- FortiAnalyzer
- FortiSandbox



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