



CASE STUDY

# Nationwide MSP Bolsters Services With Secure SD-WAN and More Robust Security Tools



Founded in 1998, TPx Communications is a nationwide managed service provider (MSP) that delivers unified communications, managed IT, and network connectivity solutions to more than 30,000 businesses. The company formerly focused mostly on networking, but its 2016 acquisition of DSCI, a regional MSP, expanded the company's geographic reach and transformed it into a one-stop shop for a wide variety of managed networking, communications, and security services.

An 11-year veteran of the company, Erik Nordquist witnessed this transformation with his own eyes. "I started with the Network Integrity team, dealing with complaints that came in for customer sites," he recalls. "Most of those complaints involved spam or performance issues caused by intrusions, so I learned a lot about troubleshooting security problems. Most customers do not monitor their networks well, and do not maintain logs. Thus, it would sometimes take weeks for a customer to pinpoint the problem."

## Building In-house Managed Firewall Services

Nordquist was familiar with FortiGate next-generation firewalls (NGFWs) for his entire tenure at TPx, as the company previously was a reseller of a FortiGate managed firewall service delivered by another third party. After TPx acquired a small regional MSP (DSCI), which also had a managed firewall service solution based on FortiGate NGFWs, the company pulled all the managed FortiGate contracts in-house. Around the same time, TPx also built two security operations centers (SOCs) and set out to enhance its existing security offerings and create new ones.

Nordquist was involved with the transition from the third-party provider to the entirely in-house new service. "It was a natural progression for me, as I had been helping customers with cybersecurity issues for years," he notes. "After that project was complete, I was invited to transition to a product management role for the managed firewall service."

Typical TPx customers are small to midsize businesses that have very little in-house expertise in networking or cybersecurity and a limited IT budget. "Our average customer has three locations and no full-time staff devoted to IT," Nordquist explains. "And they are not cybersecurity experts by any means. For instance, I have seen many instances where an intrusion was caused by a security camera placed outside of a firewall."

"So, we sell the service as a value add," Nordquist continues. "We remind them that many breaches result from misconfigured firewalls. In addition, a poorly managed firewall often results in increased latency, prompting businesses to consider purchasing additional bandwidth to speed things up. We show these customers that they can optimize their existing bandwidth with a well-managed security architecture."

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– Erik Nordquist, Sr. Product Manager, TPx Communications

### Details

**Customer:** TPx Communications

**Industry:** MSSP/Service Provider

**Location:** Los Angeles, California, USA

## Delivering Improved Security Services

In his new role, Nordquist set to work to improve and expand security services offerings for TPx. One enhanced service that customers appreciate is automated reporting. “DSCI had licenses for FortiManager and FortiAnalyzer, but it did not utilize them to their full potential,” he remembers. “We wanted to leverage the robust capabilities in those products to offer a wide variety of customized reports and analysis for customers—from web usage reports to full compliance reports for auditors.”

TPx can also manage customers’ FortiAP wireless access points and FortiSwitch devices as a part of the managed firewall service. “Even the smallest businesses want some level of Wi-Fi access these days, so many of our customers take advantage of the built-in wireless access point management functionality of the FortiGate NGFW.”

## Providing Secure, Integrated SD-WAN

The company’s commitment to providing a comprehensive suite of services for both networking and security recently prompted TPx to expand the networking part of their firewall service powered by Fortinet Secure SD-WAN. Software-defined wide-area network (SD-WAN) technology enables businesses to connect their various locations using the public internet rather than relying on expensive multiprotocol label switching (MPLS) circuits, saving infrastructure costs. SD-WAN also often improves user experience for employees using business applications at branch locations.

TPx previously offered a managed SD-WAN solution, but it was based on SD-WAN and NGFW offerings that were sold and managed separately. “We were servicing two different products with two different sets of technology, which increased our costs and complicated both operations and troubleshooting,” Nordquist describes. “This, in turn, increased the cost to the customer while diminishing the customer experience.”

The Fortinet solution solves these problems. “With security and SD-WAN delivered from the same box, we can offer a truly integrated service at an affordable price point and a high level of customer satisfaction,” Nordquist contends.

## Bolstering Customers’ Security Posture

TPx subscribes to the FortiGuard Unified Threat Protection (UTP) bundle as part of its services, which enables all the features of the unified threat management (UTM) bundle, including advanced malware protection, web filtering, intrusion prevention system (IPS), and application control.

Nordquist also encourages customers to use the features of the FortiGate NGFW to enhance security and reduce risk. “Intent-based segmentation is especially important in regulated industries like financial services and healthcare,” Nordquist notes. “Most small businesses do not understand the importance of segmenting regulated data, so it takes some education.”

In addition to the above, Nordquist strongly encourages customers to activate secure sockets layer (SSL)/transport layer security (TLS) inspection to ensure that encrypted traffic is inspected. “More than 70% of malware is now encrypted, so customers that do not activate this feature are missing the threats that come their way,” Nordquist says. “And with FortiGate, activating SSL/TLS inspection does not cause any appreciable impact on performance. The latest upgrades to the security processors in the FortiGate firewalls enable SSL/TLS processing to complete even faster.”

## Business Impact

- Projected significant increase in revenue per order with new managed secure SD-WAN offering
- Improved security posture for customers due to integrated, comprehensive security protection
- Higher efficiency for service provider via streamlined management and reporting
- Lower costs for customers due to increased efficiency in providing managed services
- Enhanced analysis via retaining NGFW logs using FortiAnalyzer

## Solutions

- FortiGate
- Fortinet Secure SD-WAN
- FortiManager
- FortiAnalyzer
- FortiAP
- FortiSwitch
- FortiClient
- FortiToken

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## Leveraging Certification and Support

TPx takes advantage of the Fortinet Network Security Expert (NSE) certification program, which provides independent validation of employees' expertise with network security in general, and Fortinet products in particular. "We are a Fortinet shop and we expect all our security specialists to be certified Fortinet experts," Nordquist asserts. "The NSE 4 certification is required for all SOC employees before they start serving customers—and some have achieved the highest level, NSE 8. Though achieving this level of certification is not easy, Fortinet provides many online resources to help employees prepare for the exams."

TPx also subscribes to the FortiCare 24x7 support contract. "Since we are all NSE certified, we can do most troubleshooting ourselves," Nordquist points out. "But having an expert in a particular niche available to help when needed has been a lifesaver more than once."

*"Using FortiAnalyzer, TPx delivers actionable insights about our customers' security posture, giving our small business customers an enterprise level of analysis."*

– Erik Nordquist, Sr. Product Manager,  
TPx Communications

## Realizing Big Benefits

Building a complete suite of managed security services around Fortinet products and services has brought great benefits to TPx Communications. "Having an integrated security solution—with SD-WAN networking built in—really enables us to deliver streamlined services effectively—at an affordable price," Nordquist asserts.

TPx expects to see a big bump in revenue with its new Fortinet-powered Secure SD-WAN offering. "A highly affordable solution, we expect Secure SD-WAN to significantly increase our average revenue per order," Nordquist relates.

In addition, the robust management and analytics capabilities in FortiManager, FortiAnalyzer, help TPx to deliver better services to customers. "The compliance reporting capabilities are more than robust," Nordquist asserts. "No matter what regulations and standards a customer must comply with, we can use the canned reports and intuitive customization features to provide them with the perfect report delivered at the right time. It is a big value add for the customer, but barely requires any staff time."

FortiAnalyzer also enables TPx to provide more robust analysis. "Leveraging the integration capabilities of FortiAnalyzer, we can deliver actionable insights about our customers' security posture," Nordquist says. "This gives our small business customers an enterprise level of analysis."

FortiManager also helps the SOC team at TPx be more efficient in their service delivery. "We previously had to log into each customer device individually," Nordquist remembers. "Now we have centralized visibility and control of all customer devices from a single console."

## Looking To the Future

TPx has recently launched a new Managed Detection and Response (MDR) service level as part of its MSx managed firewall offering.

"We are really excited about this service," Nordquist says. "MDR is now one of the fastest-growing segments in the cybersecurity market, and it is a milestone for us in offering comprehensive security protection. MDR does more than block suspicious IP addresses and preconfigured static signatures; it augments existing security controls with advanced technology and dedicated security analysts who combine context, deep security understanding, and expertise with today's best technology to make data actionable and stop potential threats faster. It would not have been possible without our strong partnership with Fortinet."



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