



CASE STUDY

Robust and Integrated Security Tools Help a Nationwide MSP



Founded in 1998, TPx Communications is a nationwide managed services 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.

A 10-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 their security logs. Thus, it would sometimes take weeks for the 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 a third party. After TPx acquired DSCI, which had its own FortiGate-based managed firewall service, the company combined those services by pulling the reseller contracts in-house. Around the same time, TPx also built two security operations centers (SOCs) and set out to enhance existing security offerings and create new ones.

Nordquist was involved with the transition from the third-party provider to the new in-house 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 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: Technology

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 also manages customers’ FortiAP wireless access points as a part of the managed firewall service. “Even the smallest businesses want some level of Wi-Fi access these days, so most of our customers take advantage of the built-in, integrated capabilities in the FortiGate,” Nordquist notes.

In response to customer requests, TPx recently deployed the FortiPortal multi-tenant management portal, giving customers controlled access to certain configuration settings and analytics. “Even though most customers never make any changes on their own using the portal, it gives them peace of mind to be able to view their settings,” Nordquist says. “And we have the flexibility to block access to configuration changes that could cause problems.”

TPx also recently added the FortiSIEM security information and event management (SIEM) tool and is phasing out a legacy SIEM solution. “Our prior SIEM was not natively multi-tenant, which was a big problem with our business model,” Nordquist explains. “FortiSIEM is a more robust tool that can help build a bridge between the SOC and the network operations center [NOC] to enable optimal performance and security. Being able to view and manage everything through a single pane of glass is a real advantage.”

Bolstering Customers’ Security Posture

TPx subscribes to the FortiGate Unified Threat Protection (UTM) bundle and offers two different levels of protection to managed firewall customers. The higher level enables all the features of the 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 half of malware is now encrypted, so customers that do not activate this feature are missing half of the threats that come their way,” Nordquist says. “And with FortiGate, activating SSL/TLS inspection does not impact performance.”

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 specialists to be certified Fortinet experts,” Nordquist asserts. “The NSE 4 certification is required for all SOC employees before they start servicing customers—and some have

Business Impact

- 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 FortiManager
- Secure FortiPortal access to configurations gives customers greater peace of mind.

Solutions

- FortiGate NGFW
- FortiManager
- FortiAnalyzer
- FortiSIEM
- FortiAP
- FortiClient
- FortiAuthenticator
- FortiPortal

“Using FortiAnalyzer and FortiSIEM to deliver actionable insights about our customers’ security posture gives our small business customers an enterprise level of analysis.”

– Erik Nordquist, Sr. Product Manager, TPx Communications

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.”

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 really enables us to deliver streamlined services effectively—at an affordable price,” Nordquist asserts.

Robust management and analytics capabilities in FortiManager, FortiAnalyzer, and FortiSIEM 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 and FortiSIEM also enable TPx to provide more robust analysis. “We are able to ingest penetration testing data from Nexpose from Rapid7, information on bad IP addresses from NetFlow, and aggregated threat intelligence from all our customers’ firewalls,” Nordquist says. “In addition, leveraging the integration capabilities of FortiAnalyzer and FortiSIEM, we can deliver actionable insights about our customers’ security posture—which 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

As TPx continues to build its services offerings, it expects to launch a new offering later this year: a SOC-as-a-service offering based on FortiSIEM. “We are really excited about this service,” Nordquist reflects. “The SOC offering is a milestone for us in offering comprehensive security protection. It would not have been possible without our strong partnership with Fortinet.”

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