

Nicolet National Banks on Palo Alto Networks for Next Generation Firewall

"I really like the visibility I gain into our network. I can literally review our logs very easily at any time and tell anyone what applications are being used, and by whom, in minutes."

— Jon Biskner, Chief Information Security Officer, Nicolet National Bank

BACKGROUND

Nicolet National Bank offers localized, knowledgeable decision-making, wealth management and investment services designed to create long-lasting relationships within the communities it serves. Since opening in 2000, Nicolet National has served the community of Green Bay, Wisconsin, growing in assets to \$500 million. By the end of 2006, Nicolet National's trust department had over \$530 million under management and over \$65 million under supervision.

NETWORK-CENTRIC VISION VERSUS PALO ALTO NETWORKS VISIBILITY

Nicolet National Bank was satisfied with the security level it had achieved by deploying a variety of products. For seven years firewall software from Check Point, coupled with other appliances, had been employed to stop potentially hazardous Internet traffic on its corporate network. And while Nicolet National's IT staff would have preferred greater visibility into risk and real-time security events on its network, and to better understand which applications we're being used, it was pleased with its overall security posture.

Despite this, the company decided to conduct a routine competitive analysis just to see if other solutions might offer more capabilities or unforeseen advantages. During its review, Nicolet National became intrigued by Palo Alto Networks' approach to security, which differs from other vendors by wedding application and network security together in the firewall. Thus, it decided to evaluate the PA-4000 Series next-generation firewall to determine if it might deliver more visibility into their security posture, ideally with simplified management and maintenance than the bank's current multi-vendor environment required.

AN EYE-OPENING EVALUATION

The analysis of the PA-4000 Series produced several revelations for Nicolet National's IT team. Foremost, the system offered more granular information to afford Nicolet National an unprecedented view of the applications and data entering and leaving the company's network, such as attachments and zip files. "The degree of visibility allowed by the PA-4000 Series is dramatically better than that we've experienced with previous products," explains Jon Biskner, Chief Information Security Officer for Nicolet National Bank. "We really liked how we could dig down into potential threats on our network.



ORGANIZATION:

Nicolet National Bank

INDUSTRY:

Financial Services

CHALLENGE:

Increase application visibility for compliance reporting, enhance security and consolidate security infrastructure.

SOLUTION:

Palo Alto Networks PA-4000 Series next-generation firewall for granular visibility of threats, better control of Internet applications and lower operational costs.

RESULTS:

- Increased application security and user protocols.
- Improved compliance reporting.
- Reduced operational costs.
- Heightened visibility into threat landscape.

“Once we implemented the PA-4000 Series as our firewall, we realized we could do a lot more with our security and risk posture while also simplifying the management of our security infrastructure.”

Jon Biskner,
Chief Information Security Officer,
Nicolet National Bank

Impressed, Nicolet National confirmed that all of its applications are compatible with the PA-4000 Series and began to install the system. They began with an IT-only deployment, but quickly transitioned to a full-fledged firewall deployment, with all of its employees, applications, and rules running through the PA-4000 Series. The heightened network visibility and monitoring the system provides enables Nicolet National to implement application usage policies for its employees, and reduce the bandwidth and productivity drains associated with non-business applications. With the PA-4000 Series in place as its firewall, the Bank plans to decommission its Check Point firewalls, a step which will help to homogenize its security environment and lower its operational costs.

Although Biskner’s IT team thought Check Point was easy to use, they conducted a vulnerability test and found the PA-4000 Series superior at tracking application and network activity and making the information readily accessible. “It’s a big challenge to get anything out of the network logs produced by Check Point,” adds Biskner. To review information in network logs, all a Palo Alto Networks user must do is log into the system. “Using the PA-4000 Series, I really like the ease with which I can review logs and gain visibility into our network,” continues Biskner. “It’s kind of eerie because compliance auditors used to ask me all the time if I review our network logs. I would tell them they’re crazy, we get millions of hits a day! Plus traditional firewalls don’t look at applications. But now I can literally review those logs and tell anyone what’s going on in minutes, which facilitates our compliance reporting.”

A BANK SAVES MONEY

Nicolet National Bank is so bullish on Palo Alto Networks that it is consolidating its entire security infrastructure around the PA-4000 Series. This is enabling it to consolidate several functions into the PA-4000 Series that had been spread across multiple vendors’ products in its security environment. These products include filtering appliances, an outside firewall and the tools Nicolet National currently uses to manage their network firewall logs.

“In the future, we believe Palo Alto Networks will allow us to eliminate the need for some of the programs we currently use, which will help us save on costs,” says Biskner. “Moreover, we’re finding the PA-4000 Series so easy to use that we don’t need external engineers to help us program it. We’re able to do it all on our own, which saves us even more money. Sometimes ensuring business applications are available and protecting customer and operational data are competing demands, but Palo Alto Networks helps us achieve both goals.”

