

Fortune 500 Financial Services Firm Invests in a More Secure Future

“The Palo Alto Networks system holds a great deal of promise for simplifying security infrastructure. Strategically, that could translate to the ability to reduce the number of technologies we use and simplify our infrastructure - all while maintaining a very high level of security and resiliency.”

— Doug Ross, Chief Technology Officer, Western & Southern Financial Group

BACKGROUND

Western & Southern Financial Group is a dynamic family of diversified financial services companies that provides life insurance, retirement planning and investment products and services to help consumers and institutions plan and protect their financial futures. With a heritage that dates back to 1888, Western & Southern owns, manages and cares for assets in excess of \$48 billion. A Fortune 500 company, Western & Southern employs more than 5,000 associates and its selling group is comprised of more than 50,000 individuals.

SEEKING VISIBILITY FOR TODAY'S THREAT LANDSCAPE

Western & Southern Financial Group continually evaluates processes and technologies that can improve its security posture. “In the financial services world, security is an overriding concern. That clearly motivates us to continually monitor measure and improve,” explains Doug Ross, Western & Southern’s Chief Technology Officer.

TOO MANY TECHNOLOGIES IMPEDE VISION

The company’s security environment utilizes a wide variety of products -- from network firewalls and network intrusion software to data loss prevention tools – all from different vendors. Western & Southern has identified opportunities to streamline this sophisticated, but highly heterogeneous, security infrastructure. Moreover, the level of security this type of infrastructure provides could be enhanced as well. “The risk landscape today revolves primarily around Layer 7,” says Ross. “Applications can provide cover for threats lurking within the stream that are not identified by most of the products on the market – especially in a heterogeneous system environment that is multi-vendor in nature and could leave white spaces and gaps.” Thus, Western & Southern sought to improve its security posture and increase visibility into potential threats. It has identified opportunities to eventually simplify its infrastructure as well. This would allow teams to spend more time building the business and less on IT management.



ORGANIZATION:

Western & Southern Financial Group

INDUSTRY:

Financial Services

CHALLENGE:

Enhance security to protect sensitive customer data. Reduce the heterogeneous nature of the corporate infrastructure, increase its manageability and reduce operational costs.

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:

- Less dependency on myriad vendors for security.
- Heightened visibility of risks.
- A more granular view into threats.
- Reduced IT costs.

“Our testing demonstrated that the Palo Alto Networks system was able to identify evasive adware and malware, which none of our other technologies detected.”

Doug Ross,
Chief Technology Officer,
Western & Southern
Financial Group

Western & Southern researched numerous solutions and chose the Palo Alto Networks PA-4000 Series. Based on Palo Alto Networks’ patent pending App-ID™ application classification technology, the PA-4000 Series is a next-generation firewall that gives organizations unmatched visibility into, and policy control over, applications flowing in and out of its networks, regardless of port, protocol, SSL encryption, or evasive tactics. The PA-4000 Series identifies traditional and emerging applications – including those embedded in an SSL session – to facilitate total application access and usage control while enabling broad, real-time threat prevention.

BETTER VIEW FROM PA-4000 SERIES

The Western & Southern IT team found that the system provides a better fingerprint and more granular insight into its network than it had experienced with any other product. “Our testing showed that App-ID™ was capable of identifying workstations hosting adware and malware when those applications attempted to phone home,” adds Ross. “We have personal firewalls, antivirus and all of the other standard host security packages on each desktop image, yet our tests showed that some malicious programs could still make it by the signature-driven tools. In our experience, only Palo Alto Networks could identify these evasive applications and harmful programs.”

BENEFITS SEEN AND UNFORESEEN

The Palo Alto Networks PA-4000 Series has delivered everything that Western & Southern had envisioned, and some it had not. It effectively identified suspicious software on workstations and provided a clearer view of risks. But in the process of using the system, Western & Southern discovered additional benefits, such as its ability to pinpoint applications taking advantage of open ports and proactively shutting them down. Another bonus Western & Southern appreciates is the system’s ability to provide geographic pinpointing of sources and destinations. This allows the company to track network traffic going back and forth between specific countries and regions where it does not do business. Thus, Western & Southern can now ensure that there is a legitimate business rationale for such traffic.

Presently, Western & Southern has not implemented all of the capabilities of the PA-4000 Series. Nonetheless, its tactical advantages were sufficient for executive management to approve funding for the system. This was due to the fact that Ross and his team could clearly demonstrate the enhanced security Palo Alto Networks delivers, and articulate its bottom-line business benefits as well. “We believe there is potential for the PA-4000 Series to eventually replace other platforms in our infrastructure architecture as they reach end of life,” says Ross. “The resulting reduction in operational costs could prove to be significant if we are able to manage fewer devices while improving our security posture. The Palo Alto Networks architecture holds a great deal of promise for this strategic vision.”

