

Success Story



Insurance Administrator Goes Green and Bolsters Security with Astaro

Like many companies across the U.S., Underwriters Safety and Claims has launched a green IT initiative, seeking to reduce its data-center footprint to save both money and energy.

As the company began its green IT push, it also had to ensure that another IT issue was addressed: security. Existing Cisco PIX security appliances were nearing the end of their product life cycles and failed to meet new insurance industry challenges.

Meeting compliance regulations was a top concern for the company as well. As a third-party administrator (TPA), Underwriters Safety and Claims is responsible for processing insurance claims and policies for clients and commercial businesses alike. The company not only needed to meet new industry regulations, but also had to handle regular requests for audits. The legacy Cisco devices simply couldn't generate the

necessary reports and log files to keep up with demands.

At the same time, the company's Novell BorderManager server was also nearing the end of its lifecycle, and uncertainty loomed around the product's future roadmap. Add it all up, and it was time to investigate new security options.

The Search for Integrated Security

"When we started looking, we decided we wanted more features than what we had," said Grant Nickle, IT Director for Underwriters Safety and Claims. "For instance, we wanted to integrate virus scanning at the network gateway level and to have the ability to look at active logs in real time."

Nickle also hoped to find something that would simplify security management. "Our IT staff is small; my team consists of three, so I couldn't let us get bogged down with complex configurations and labor-intensive, day-to-day administration," he said.

Complicating matters was the fact that the IT staff at Underwriters Safety and Claims serves two distinct sets of end users. The first is the company's 300 internal employees, who are spread out in offices across the

country and all access the Internet through Underwriters' central data center in Louisville, KY.

The second group that Grant Nickle and his IT colleagues serve is large business customers, mostly comprised of insurance agencies and some private businesses that have purchased workers compensation and other business-class insurance policies from Underwriters.

"We have to grant a high degree of access to external users," Nickle said. "We run a number of industry-specific applications. With the ports that must be kept open and the types of communications we must allow in order to service customers, it was hard to configure the Cisco and Novell devices to handle all of this without getting outside help."

About Astaro

Astaro is a leader in delivering Internet security appliances. The Astaro Security Gateway simplifies Email, Web & Network Security and has won numerous industry awards as it protects over 30,000 networks in 60 countries. Astaro products are distributed by a worldwide partner network with more than 2,000 solution partners offering local support and services. Astaro Corporation is headquartered in Karlsruhe, Germany, and Burlington, USA.



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The Switch to Astaro

Underwriters Safety and Claims considered a number of security vendors. They looked at the next generation of Cisco devices, as well as security offerings from SonicWall and Juniper. "Each had certain things they did well, but we're a small IT shop. Ideally, what we wanted was something that would more or less do it all and do it all well."

Nickle eventually turned to the Astaro Security Gateway, a unified threat management appliance. Astaro Security Gateway combines a full range of security features, including central administration, e-mail encryption, secure SSL VPN connectivity, firewall, virus scanning and comprehensive clustering functionality to help customers maximize security investments.

Nickle cited a number of reasons for choosing Astaro. "Our auditors were pushing for better security auditing capabilities. The Cisco PIX couldn't do that, so we didn't have the log trails that auditors prefer."

Astaro, on the other hand, has the ability to create logs and offload them quickly to storage. Nickle expected and needed that capability. What surprised him, though, was the performance. "Even with logging turned on, the performance is still better than what we had before. End users immediately noticed the improved performance," he said.

Other benefits he cited were its support for a range of operating systems and applications and its wizard-driven configurations. "In the past, when we had to make changes, it involved at least two IT people and usually a third party we had to call in from the outside," Nickle said. "And when something went wrong, we knew we were in for a lot of trouble-shooting. Was it PIX? Was it BorderManager? The Internet provider? We didn't know."

Now, since all traffic is routed through the Astaro gateway, problems can be pinpointed quickly and changes can be made on the fly with little or no interruption to end users.

The Search for Integrated Security

The fact that Astaro combines what would normally be multiple security devices into a single appliance plays well to Underwriters Safety and Claims' goal of switching to a green data center.

Underwriters Safety and Claims is in the planning stages of a virtualization project that will reduce its servers by about 60 percent. However, any honest assessment of the green IT movement has to admit that cost savings come first. Fewer servers means fewer dollars spent on over-provisioning hardware.

Meanwhile, reduced power consumption and smaller physical footprints stretch IT budgets even further.

This cost dynamic was certainly part of the decision to switch to Astaro. "We had a zero-day payback with Astaro," Nickle said. Since Underwriters had legacy security devices, they would have to invest in new security devices one way or another.

"Astaro cost about a third of what it would have cost to update and maintain the other devices, and as far as administration, it probably saves us a couple hours a week."

Conclusion

Now, Nickle is doing more with less, which is a must in these days of tight IT budgets. By choosing Astaro as part of the green IT initiative, though, Nickle has gone even further

and done the seemingly impossible: he's made everyone from employees to customers to auditors to management to IT itself happy.

Underwriters Safety & Claims



Underwriters Safety and Claims is a growing innovative regional insurance agency and service provider. Since our founding in 1941, we have developed and are proud of our reputation as a quality provider of insurance products. The multi-faceted divisions of the company provide our clients with a seamless array of insurance services. These services can be combined quickly and efficiently to meet the demands of business today. Underwriters, in conjunction with our third party administration business, continues to expand in the managed care field. Through our subsidiary, Bluegrass Health Network, we now provide all of the necessary medical cost containment techniques to allow our customers the most cost-effective service available in one centralized operation.



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