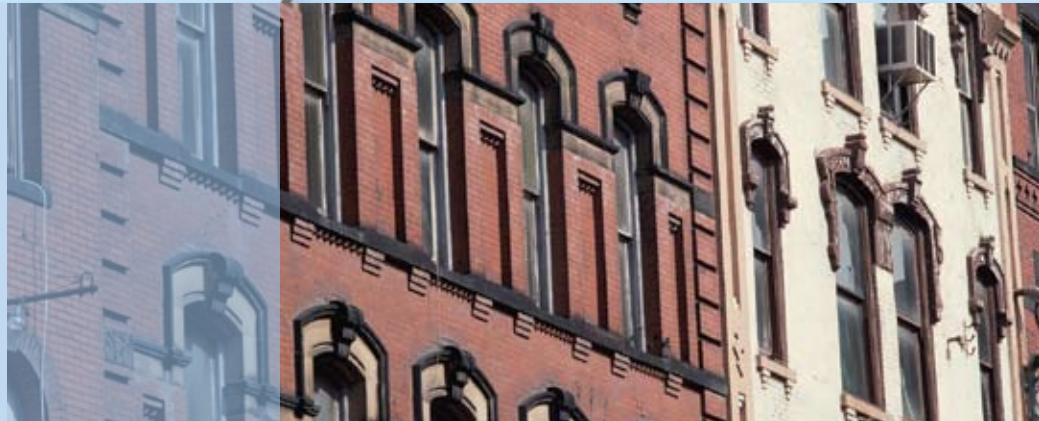


“This solution gives us more robust security and much better service at the same cost as our previous security provider.”

Jan Swanwick
IT Manager
Southern Housing Group



CUSTOMER NAME

Southern Housing Group

INDUSTRY

Not-for-profit housing association

CHECK POINT PRODUCTS

- VPN-1® Pro™
- Safe@Office™

CUSTOMER NEEDS MET

- Reduced communications costs
- Faster throughput and user authentication
- High level of security at reasonable cost
- Stress-free security

Southern Housing Group renovates security for network of small offices

ABOUT SOUTHERN HOUSING GROUP

Thirty-five thousand people in southeast England have good-quality, affordable places to live in safe, attractive, sustainable communities because of the Southern Housing Group. Founded in 1901, this not-for-profit housing association owns and manages over 19,000 properties for rent, leasehold, and low-cost home ownership. Working in partnership with 50 local authorities, Southern Housing Group supports property regeneration projects, community development programs, and new construction to address the area’s housing crisis.

Its innovative projects include an historic military factory transformed into an award-winning riverside community of 1,200 homes. A derelict Victorian block was brought back to life as energy-efficient homes for local people. A starter home initiative helped teachers, health workers, police, and other key workers to buy homes in the communities they serve. One of the Group’s most ambitious projects, undertaken with extensive resident participation, involves demolishing an existing rundown housing estate and rebuilding 360 new homes next to a regenerated public park. The Group is also collaborating with renowned architect Frank Gehry on a futuristic, seafront development of 500 homes, 40 percent of which will be affordable housing.

THE GROUP’S CHALLENGE

Southern Housing Group is a medium-size organization of 500 employees with an extensive network of remote offices. In addition to the head office, an operational center, and four regional offices, the Group has approximately 60 estate offices and temporary on-site project management offices. The number of remote locations fluctuates as projects are started and completed. Cost-effective site-to-site IP virtual private networks connect all the locations.

“We have a diverse multi-node IT network that requires us to be extremely flexible because a large number of users change locations as new projects emerge,” explained Jan Swanwick, IT manager, Southern Housing Group.

In this dynamic environment, security was a persistent problem. Though the Group had outsourced security management, viruses and other intrusions continued to take a toll on network performance and user productivity. "We had multiple points of access spreading viruses in the network, and we lacked a central platform for user authentication. We needed more foolproof security," recalled Swanwick.

THE CHECK POINT AND CENTRIC NETWORKS SOLUTION

Centric Networks architected a flexible, scalable solution for Southern Housing Group, based on Check Point VPN-1® Pro™ software. VPN-1 Pro is an integrated firewall and VPN gateway providing comprehensive security and remote connectivity to applications and network resources.

Centric Networks provides network and security management services and consultancy primarily to medium and large enterprises in the United Kingdom and Europe. The company wins customers with service level agreements that few competitors can afford to match. Centric Networks' principal security offering and preferred security management platform is Check Point. "Check Point security is the most robust, reliable, and innovative on the market," said Fraser Fisher, managing director, Centric Networks. "The enormous flexibility Check Point gives us in remote management is one reason we can be more cost-effective and deliver higher value than competitors."

Southern Housing Group's estate offices link securely to the head office network through a Check Point firewall over a VPN. They also use Checkpoint to manage the VPNs and extranets to suppliers with whom they work in partnership for delivery of services to their tenants. After analyzing the Group's total security requirements, Centric Networks designed a flexible, up-to-date, site-to-site VPN solution for connecting and managing security for the scores of estate and project offices. The solution implements Nokia IP Security Platforms (IP380 and IP120), preconfigured Check Point VPN-1 Pro software at the head office and operational center, and Check Point Safe@Office™ at the remote offices, plugged in between the office network and the Internet. Security policies and updates are always consistent and current, managed centrally by Centric Networks. New offices can be up and ready for secure communications within 10 minutes of plugging in the appliance.

THE BENEFITS OF CHECK POINT SECURITY

"There is no point in having one heavily guarded door if all the others are opened, and that was the situation we had. Centric Networks and Check Point have closed the doors and provided an extremely stress-free solution," said Swanwick.

Lower telecommunications costs

Some Group offices use dial-up ISDN connections to the company network. Without safeguards in place, port scans ran up the telephone charges, sometimes for weeks before Southern Housing Group received the bill and realized the problem. "Centric Networks closed that door by placing dial-up network access on the DMZ side of our Check Point firewall, so neither viruses nor port scans can get through," said Swanwick. "Thanks to the Check Point solution, we have reduced our monthly telephone bill by £9,000 [approximately US\$16,800]."

Faster throughput and user authentication

Centric helped the Group properly size its platform for the Check Point firewall, substantially improving throughput. "We have a high-speed network that now operates at full bandwidth," said Swanwick. "User authentication is now instant rather than the 20 to 30 seconds it used to take."

More reliable Internet access

Internet availability has improved dramatically. The Group used to lose Internet access regularly every month for half a day. "With the Check Point solution managed by Centric Networks, we have had 100 percent Internet availability since deployment 9 months ago," reported Swanwick.

Flexible, affordable security

As a not-for-profit organization operating for the public good, Southern Housing Group is extremely cost conscious. "This solution gives us more robust security and much better service at the same cost as our previous security provider," said Swanwick. "We gain additional savings because the solution is completely outsourced, and we do not have to expend staff resources to resolve issues."

THE SOUTHERN HOUSING GROUP'S FUTURE

With a robust and flexible security solution in place, Southern Housing Group is developing policies to allow a greater number of employees to work from their home offices. "We can easily accommodate a larger number of remote workers because of the substantially improved throughput of our firewall platform," said Swanwick. "Home office workers will use either Check Point SecuRemote® or SecureClient™ for secure Internet access, and we plan to have Centric Networks manage that as well."

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