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Marc Stiehr
Senior Director of Network Technology
YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago



CUSTOMER NAME

YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago

INDUSTRY

Non-profit

CHECK POINT PRODUCTS

- Connectra™

CUSTOMER NEEDS MET

- Provided a safe and reliable infrastructure
- Offered a cost-effective solution combined with unmatched security
- Ensured the confidentiality and integrity of restricted information

YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago Continues Reputation of Reliability with Check Point Connectra

ABOUT THE YMCA OF METROPOLITAN CHICAGO

Through its 65 locations and more than 100 extension sites, the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago helps children learn and grow, teaches young people to lead, brings families closer, and encourages individual health and well-being. The fourth largest non-profit in Chicago and one of the largest human services organizations in the nation, YMCA programs impact hundreds of thousands of lives annually, helping to strengthen neighborhoods and respond to community needs across Chicagoland.

THE YMCA CHALLENGE

The YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago is the largest housing and one of the largest childcare providers in Chicago. The sheer size of the organization comes with many inherent problems concerning remote access connections. Furthermore, the YMCA runs programs in facilities that are not always their own. Marc Stiehr, Senior Director of Network Technology, put together a Wide Area Network (WAN) with high speed data and voice lines for all the facilities the YMCA owns.

“We manage childcare sites in churches and schools, as well as after-school programs in Chicago public schools,” says Stiehr. “We had to find a way we could connect those sites to us while they were not directly on the WAN.” Another driver that led the YMCA to evaluate remote-access solutions was the growing demand from employees to connect to the network from their home or off-site locations. According to Stiehr, the number of people with the desire or need to work remotely is increasing significantly.

“A lot of businesses have moved toward virtual offices or telecommuting and, even though we’re a nonprofit, we tend to operate in many ways much like the for-profit world,” says Stiehr. “We have the same needs and desires for flexibility.”



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A growing number of individuals at the management level, whether they are executive directors who run branches or business managers who work at multiple locations or off-site locations, needed to take their laptops and connect remotely. The challenge was to provide these workers with a way to take their laptops off-site or work from home but still be able to connect to the network and access their desktops to retrieve important information.

“When we go outside of the WAN, we have to make sure that we protect not only the individual who’s trying to get in but also protect the network to ensure that each individual is an authorized user and that they are not introducing viruses into the network,” says Stiehr. “We needed some protection at the gateway and that is what drove the decision to use the Connectra product.”

THE CHECK POINT SOLUTION

With assistance from RKON Technologies, Inc., the YMCA found its solution in Check Point Connectra™. A complete Web security gateway, Connectra provides SSL VPN access, comprehensive endpoint security, and integrated intrusion prevention in a single, unified solution. By combining SSL VPN connectivity and security in one, the YMCA can effectively deploy SSL VPNs safely and securely to a diverse set of users while ensuring the confidentiality and integrity of information critical to business success.

The YMCA ran a pilot program that was deployed to a dozen people for six months. “We tested this with laptop users and also with remote and childcare sites,” says Stiehr. “Once we were convinced that everything was running beautifully and reliably, then we rolled it out to the rest of our laptop users and anybody trying to gain remote access.”

THE BENEFITS OF CHECK POINT SECURITY

For the YMCA, the number one advantage of deploying Connectra was centralized management. According to Stiehr, not having to worry about loading individual clients has saved him and his support staff a lot of time.

“We’re supporting 3,500 users on more than 700 workstations in 40 facilities with limited support staff,” says Stiehr. “We have a very small group of people that comprise our support staff so it is imperative that our tools maximize efficiency and make our lives easier. Connectra does this for us. It doesn’t require a lot of management or configuration and work reliably. It’s everything we need it to be and we no longer need to search for other options.”

Seamless integration

“I’m a firm believer in making use of products that are designed to work well together,” says Stiehr. “I would rather stay with a given company and utilize a suite of integrated products than to mix solutions from several different companies’ products, trying to piece them together and make them work fluidly.”

No other solutions were evaluated besides Connectra. According to Stiehr, his staff was happy with the other Check Point solutions they had previously put into place and saw no reason to stray.

Simplified deployment

Connectra offers simple deployment and its management interface allows IT security departments to oversee an entire remote-access system with only one administrator. It can be deployed in a network DMZ or on a trusted LAN and is easy to install, simple to manage, and supports several authentication options.

Ease of use

Along with seamless integration, Connectra is very easy to use. According to Stiehr, “Customers like it because of its accessibility. Once set up, it saves time and avoids having to load and reload and manage clients on each PC or laptop. That was very time consuming in the past,” says Stiehr.

THE FUTURE OF YMCA

Due to the YMCA’s satisfaction with Connectra, the organization will examine other Check Point products, including the company’s universal threat management (UTM) appliance, an all-in-one solution that comprises anti-spyware, firewall, VPN, antivirus, and intrusion prevention capability.

The YMCA is an organization that almost never closes its doors and, thus, requires a disaster-recovery strategy. This is something the next version of Connectra will aid as it will support VMware ESX, providing virtualization capability. In addition, Stiehr and his staff are in the process of virtualizing the organization’s 30 servers. “Since everything is in a point-of-sale environment, it requires us to be real time and have all our systems available both at the primary data center and out of our disaster-recovery site,” says Stiehr.

These enhancements will allow the YMCA to provide more flexibility and security to its workforce and stakeholders, as well as ensure that business-critical systems are always operating.

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