Redcats

Cryptzone's AppGate Satellite Secures Collaboration For Redcats

REDCATS

Quick facts

Organization
- World leader in home shopping
- Portfolio of international brands

Challenges
- Ability to cost effectively scale its customer contact center in response to call volumes quickly and securely
- Limiting network access for tertiary call center
- Compliance with Data Protection Act and PCI DSS regulations

Solution
- Small AppGate Satellite appliance acting as a virtual network interface

Benefits
- Enforcement of security policies relating to contractor access
- Plug and play deployment to 3rd party site
- Automated software updates
- Encrypted communications

Background

Redcats UK (part of Redcats Group – one of the largest home shopping organizations in the world) stands at the forefront of fashion, design and e-commerce with a portfolio of international brands such as; La Redoute, Vertbaudet, Daxon, Ellos and OneStopPlus.

In addition to its online stores, regular promotions and special offers, each brand regularly issues and sends a catalogue to its registered customer database. As you'd expect, this activity results in an increased level of traffic to its customer call centres – two operated by Redcats itself in the UK; one outsourced call centre also in the UK; and one other EU based outsourced call centre.

Peter Phillips, Redcats' network analyst, explains, "Our call centres regularly experience calls spikes, usually around catalogue distributions, when a promotion is running or during festive periods. The business decided to use an outsourcing model to manage the call fluctuation and extend its opening hours. However, to do this its staff would need access to some of our computing systems."

The Challenge

Redcats had to find a way to give the tertiary call centre limited access to its network so that it could 'talk' to the contact centre software in a controlled manner maintaining system security.

Data security (including personal data) is vital to all organizations. Redcats is mindful of its responsibilities to its customers and is also mindful of its obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998 and, as a card processor handling credit card information, under PCI DSS (Payment Card Industry Data Standards Security).

PCI DSS requires relevant transmissions across a network to be encrypted. Redcats has to ensure that information is secure. As Peter confirms, "We are a PCI-DSS compliant merchant and we need to be secure."

"We need to ensure that security is maintained when allowing a third party access to our network. We need to control exactly which machines and which port numbers any external company would be able to access."

One consideration was to treat the tertiary call centre team as remote workers and install the software used by Redcats for its own remote users on to all its computers. However, this option was considered inappropriate under the circumstances.

The Solution

Redcats identified Cryptzone's AppGate Satellite as offering a suitable alternative. Cryptzone explained that, when plugged in at the tertiary call centre, the small satellite appliance would act as a virtual network interface within Redcats' AppGate server. Peter adds, "We looked into the AppGate Satellite and, once Cryptzone explained what it could do for us, and the price, we knew it would be a very cost effective fit."

Redcats was one of the first companies in the UK to acquire an AppGate Satellite. For this reason, there were a few concerns about deploying cutting edge technology, but it appeared to work in Redcats favour as Peter adds, "We were able to speak directly with the developers who wrote the software. They helped us to resolve the few minor issues that we had with such an early build."

Deploying the device to the third party site was incredibly simple. Redcats simply needed to set up the access rules and configure the device using the AppGate Security Server, and then send it to the remote office where it was plugged in. That's all the involvement needed at an external location. As long as the LAN it's plugged into can see the Internet, it works. There is no firewall configuring; there are no routings to set up – you just plug it in and it works. Best of all, the control sits with Redcats who are able to change the rules when they want to and, as soon as they click the deploy command on their AppGate Server, there is a new configuration. If further down the line Redcats find that the agreement needs to be revoked, they can simply close the connection - it's instant and is all on Redcats' terms.

Should anything go wrong with the device, a USB can be plugged into the rear of the Satellite and it will download diagnostic information. So as not to introduce a security risk this is limited to 'I started up, this is my version number, I connected to this IP address, I've set up a successful tunnel or not, etc.', it does not include specific information, such as the addresses it has routed to, nor any of the configuration details. This file can then be emailed to Redcats to take a look at and identify the problem.

If the Satellite software needs updating then this happens automatically when the AppGate Security Server is upgraded. However, if the operating system needs to be upgraded, then a USB can be sent, inserted, and the operating system is automatically updated. To satisfy PCI DSS requirements, all information travelling between the two devices is encrypted. Jamie Bodley-Scott, Technical Product Manager for the AppGate family of solutions at Cryptzone confirmed that, "It's not just the packet that's encrypted, the whole connection is, satisfying PCI DSS." In fact, the encryption key to allow the satellite appliance to connect to the Redcats server is between 50 and 60 characters long! Once the connection is made no other connection is allowed, so if someone tried to connect with the same key the server would reject them."

Redcats can today cost effectively scale its customer contact centre in response to call volumes quickly and securely. For its customers, their call waiting time is reduced, improving the customer experience and therefore satisfaction. For Redcats, this is an unquantifiable benefit.

Moving forward

Having been suitably impressed by the AppGate Satellite, Redcats purchased a second device to act as a further cost-effective back up connection for its overseas contact centre, should its dedicated leased line fail.

Peter concludes, "An AppGate is certainly worth considering if you have a small office that needs to access head office data in a secure manner with the minimum configuration at the remote end. We'll certainly look at using this again if we find the need to do so."
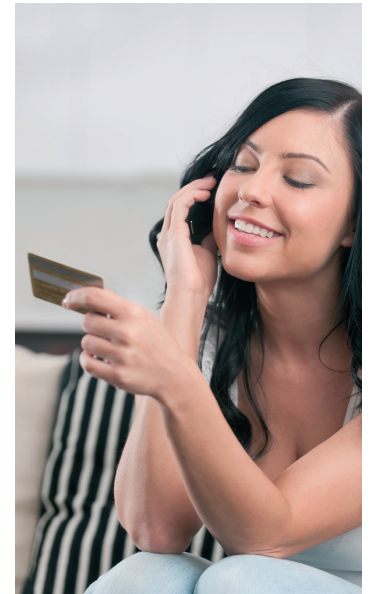
"We are a PCI DSS compliant merchant and we need to be secure."

Peter Phillips
Network Analyst
Redcats

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