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Adam Yates
Group IT Manager



INDUSTRY Property

BACKGROUND The Acorn Group is one of the largest independent estate agency networks in the South East of England and is ranked in the top 20 estate agents across the UK. The company employs more than 300 staff. Its subsidiary companies include, among others, MAP Chartered Surveyors, Start Mortgage Services, Start Conveyancing and Start Recruitment.

REQUIREMENT The Acorn Group expansion programme has continued over the last year and now has 30 offices and divisions across London and Kent. With its team dispersed across multiple locations its internal and external communications which are often time-sensitive, are heavily reliant on email. In addition, as part of its marketing campaign, it regularly places advertisements in local publications, specialist property magazines and its own in-house publication which means that generic email addresses are constantly in the public domain. The company’s consistent growth combined with its publicly available email addresses meant that securing its IT network from the latest internet threats with a unified threat management solution was of paramount importance.

Adam Yates, IT manager, The Acorn Group, explains: “With the increase in new threats, it was crucial for us to be protected with a solution that identified and blocked all threats before they caused any damage to our network. But it was equally important to have a solution that offered web, spam and virus filtering as well as automatically pushed out security updates. From past experience, keeping our security updated and managing it ourselves was tiresome and time consuming.”

Robust protection wasn’t the only criteria for The Acorn Group when it was looking for a security solution. Yates adds: “As a growing company with an increasing number of employees, the solution had to offer a fair pricing model based on the number of domains and not on the number of users. The nature of our business means that we have a fluctuating workforce with people coming and going all the time, so it needed to be cost-effective enough to accommodate our needs.”

The biggest threat The Acorn Group faced was from malicious spam and email-borne viruses. Despite using an email filtering service, 20 percent of the 100,000 inbound emails each month were spam. These had to be dealt with manually on a daily basis by each branch

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secretary or manager. One hour each day was spent filtering spam emails, costing the company an estimated £20,000 in lost productivity per year.

SOLUTION One of the key features that The Acorn Group liked about Network Box was its web content filtering capability, as the group's existing web filtering solution failed to filter out offensive content. "To purchase the web content filtering feature from our existing email filtering company was very expensive so we decided to purchase a software solution that was managed by an ISP. This didn't work at all and employees were receiving very unpleasant emails. As an employer, we have a duty of care to protect employees from this and the only option was to find a solution that provided that protection," says Yates.



When it came to choosing a solution that would meet The Acorn Group's needs, Yates initially looked at appliance-based solutions that he could manage himself.

"We have very demanding directors that expect a quick response to any queries. I couldn't see how a managed service company would prioritise and respond to these queries as quickly and efficiently as our internal IT team would. The financial director had read an article regarding the Network Box and forwarded it to me for review. After an initial meeting I still had hesitations that Network Box could meet the demands that we would undoubtedly place on them."

The Acorn Group enjoyed a trouble-free experience when implementing Network Box across the company. "The installation took minimal time and was really simple," says Yates. "Network Box was very thorough in setting up the device and as the hardware comes with pre-installed software, it didn't require any integration. During the initial set-up we had additional requirements such as three different

levels of internet access rights for our employees, which Network Box swiftly dealt with.

"We trialled Network Box for six weeks and were immediately impressed with how quickly they responded to our queries and we were always made to feel that we were their most important customer. Even more impressive was that although the Network Box was placed behind our existing email filtering service, in effect giving us two layers of filtering, it identified that an additional 10 percent of incoming emails were still spam! If we hadn't trialled Network Box, we would still have been at risk from malicious threats despite already having a layer of filtering in place. This was a key factor in convincing me to permanently keep Network Box as our only security solution."

CONCLUSION Since Implementing Network Box, The Acorn Group has been impressed by the results. Yates says: "Each month, Network Box identifies and stops 20,000 spam emails from entering our network, 4,000 malicious intrusion attacks, and blocks more than 8,000 requests each month to unauthorised websites - giving us the reassurance that staff are more productive and with the Push Technology on the Network-Box I know we're instantly protected against every type of threat."

He adds: "I'm a lot happier as we're not at risk from spyware, spam, viruses and Trojans; and with only a small internal IT team at Acorn, we can dedicate our time to other IT matters and let Network Box manage the security. More importantly, the management team is happier about the company's email security and this time, I know we're 100 percent protected."

Yates is also pleased with the return on investment he gets from Network Box. "My finance director was right about Network Box, it delivers a very efficient service that provides excellent value for our money."

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