City of San Juan Enhances Firewall Protection

Improves and simplifies protection against malware, ransomware, and data exfiltration with cloud-based DNS firewall

Ensuring a secure digital backbone

Similar to employees in urban municipalities across the United States, employees for the City of San Juan, Texas, heavily depend on technology for their jobs. That means the city's technology department plays a crucial role in guaranteeing the seamless operation of a high-performance digital backbone. And that department is led by a CTO with deep expertise.

After two decades managing IT in the education management industry, Pat Karr transitioned to the City of San Juan. One of his first projects was modernizing the city's network and IT processes. The next step was improving cybersecurity measures.

Karr knew neighboring counties and public service sectors were being impacted by malware and ransomware. As he explained, the challenge for any organization is keeping their data safe: "During a malicious attack, downtime is inevitable — whether for cleanup, reinstalling a system, or recovering data. All that equates to time, which equates to money."

Knowing every organization is a potential target, Karr was determined to be proactive. "It's not a matter of if we would get hit — it's a matter of when. Our nearly 38,000 residents and city employees can't afford the downtime and other headaches associated with such attacks. I wanted to stay ahead of threats," he continued.

Finding sophisticated simplicity in an Akamai solution

When evaluating his choices, Karr promptly dismissed the idea of dedicated cybersecurity staff. Recruiting and retaining skilled cybersecurity staff, who might be enticed by more lucrative opportunities elsewhere, made no sense. It was also too expensive to hire a consulting firm for 24/7 cybersecurity. "We needed a technology solution. My preference was a sophisticated yet user-friendly one, as I value simplicity that facilitates rapid troubleshooting," Karr said.

Location
San Juan, Texas
sjtx.us

Industry
Public Sector

Solution
Secure Internet Access Enterprise

Key Impacts
- Protected at the edge against malicious domains
- Reduced false positives with enhanced threat prevention and mitigation
- Simplified troubleshooting with easy-to-use solution

So he launched a search for one offering advanced features tailored for enterprises. Based on prior experiences, he knew solutions from Cisco and other enterprise-grade vendors were cost prohibitive. Then, he recalled using Secure Internet Access Enterprise, a cloud-based DNS firewall from Akamai. According to Karr, "It was best in breed and simple to use. Plus, Akamai provides robust engines that fortify DNS resolution — key when it comes to internet access security."

After engaging Akamai partner Carahsoft, he ran a pilot of Secure Internet Access Enterprise. "It was simple to set up. And it started protecting our network as soon as we went live," Karr continued.

He also appreciated that Akamai and Carahsoft priced and sized the solution to the city's needs: "You often pay for more than you need when it comes to tech purchases. As the custodian of our city's funds, I need to prudently manage our technology investments and can do that with the Akamai solution."

Enhancing threat prevention and mitigation

Per Karr, Secure Internet Access Enterprise complements the city's firewalls. "While our firewalls offer robust protection through antivirus, malware, and content filtering, the Akamai solution excels in identifying and blocking targeted threats through DNS resolution at the edge. Together, they enhance the city's overall threat prevention and mitigation capabilities," stated Karr.

Karr underscored the value by noting that his department handles fewer false positives and significantly fewer phone calls related to cyberthreats. When issues do arise, troubleshooting is easy. "The solution is sophisticated on the back end but simplistic on the front end. Managing a solution of this caliber with such ease is truly impressive," he said.

Aside from appreciating the hands-off nature of the Akamai solution, Karr and his team benefit from annual meetings with Akamai engineers. During these sessions, engineers provide guidance on refining the city's DNS firewall configurations and the impact of any changes made. "Their advice is invaluable. Although we could opt to meet more frequently with them, the annual check-ins are precisely what we need since our environment remains relatively stable," Karr continued.

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Secure Internet Access Enterprise blocks malicious traffic on the edge, so threats never enter our network. That means no downtime or recovery — and that protection is all delivered via an affordable, easy-to-use, cloud-based solution.

— Pat Karr
    CTO, City of San Juan

Working smarter, not harder

Besides receiving email notifications detailing threats blocked, Karr and his team can navigate the Secure Internet Access Enterprise dashboard to see a visual representation of outbound traffic, threat events, and other relevant information. "When I notice an influx of threat-related emails, I turn to the dashboard. It provides another means for me to validate that the Akamai service is effectively safeguarding us at the edge," he said.

Since Karr's staff spends minimal time managing the Akamai solution, they can spend more time focusing on ways they can empower city employees with tools and technology. That includes deploying and managing servers, apps, and production systems for email, financials, and client management, to name a few. "We leverage the Akamai solution so we can work smarter instead of harder," Karr said.

In conclusion, Karr emphasized the importance of his relationship with Akamai: "I never want to become a purchase order for a vendor. Akamai is very relationship driven and stays in touch to ensure we realize full value from the solution."

The City of San Juan improves the quality of life for all by providing affordable, consistently reliable, quality services so that its citizens can realize their full potential. An exemplary service provider, the City of San Juan will be a political leader in the region, cultivating local attractions, aesthetics, location, and community spirit to become a center for commerce, culture, and recreation.