



Gadget security begins at home for New Charter Housing Trust Group.

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BUSINESS DRIVER

Comply with privacy laws, close potential data leakage gap

INDUSTRY SECTOR

Private, Housing Trust

WHY DEVICEWALL

Ability to both monitor and manage device connections to a highly-granular level. Fast deployment and ease of use

BUSINESS BENEFITS

Minimize risk of costly internal IT security breach or data exposure with no reduction in staff productivity

When one of the largest landlords in the UK wanted to protect its customers' information against data leakage, it turned to the DeviceWall endpoint security solution from Centennial Software.

Introduction

With a turnover of £44 million, 800 staff and over 15,000 properties to manage, New Charter Housing Trust Group is one of the largest Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in the UK.

Formed in 1999, when it took over the management of properties from Tameside Council, New Charter's mission is to build and support communities by the provision of safe, comfortable, secure and affordable homes. And with a 90 per cent customer satisfaction rating, the Group is now England's top-rated large landlord.

Business challenge

As a housing organization, New Charter is custodian to vast amounts of sensitive data, such as financial records, legal files and confidential information relating to tenant issues including anti-social behavior. The accidental or malicious disclosure of any such information would not only represent a breach of data security laws but, just as importantly, betray tenant confidentiality.

During a recent security review, New Charter found a loophole. While anti-virus and firewall protection was taken care of, removable media was yet to come under the security spotlight.

The Group recognized that the growing popularity of media devices such as iPods, PDAs and USB drives posed a real security threat. While such mobile gadgetry helps to facilitate flexible working, it also means that employees could be carrying around large amounts of sensitive information unaware of the potential risks. Not only could confidential data be lost, but employees could also unwittingly introduce malware onto the network while uploading work from portable devices.

New Charter realized that it did not know how many portable media devices were being connected to the network. The situation was further complicated by the fact that certain removable devices were critical to the housing trust's day-to-day work. For example, it has more than 50 digital cameras which are frequently connected to the network by housing inspectors as part of the inspection process.



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As such, a complete ban on portable devices would be counterproductive; the only alternative was to find a solution that allowed the Group to monitor and control what devices were being connected to the network, and by who.

“We knew that many colleagues were taking work home but had no idea how the information was being transferred in and out of the office,” said John Westwood, IS Infrastructure Manager at New Charter Housing Group.

“While a committed worker may think they are the model employee by taking work home, they may unwittingly be seriously compromising our security. Habit is hard to break, and with people regularly plugging in USB drives without a thought for security, we needed more than just a written usage policy to change behavior; we needed to change the mindset surrounding removable device use.”

Solution

The Group set about exploring the options for intelligent device control. It evaluated a number of products, including DeviceLock. However, it was DeviceWall from Centennial Software that emerged as the clear winner, thanks to its ability to monitor all device connections and provide flexible enforcement of security policies.

The temporary access tool within DeviceWall – where access can be granted for a one-time use, such as if an employee needed to take a large file off-site for an external meeting, was also an important feature.

DeviceWall enabled New Charter to quickly set up Active Directory user groups with their own unique access rights. This means that a natural group such as housing inspectors can be allowed to connect digital cameras, while staff in the finance department cannot.

The trust installed DeviceWall in November 2005, deploying to over 600 desktops and 50 laptops in less than a week.

Business benefits

Thanks to its Connection Auditor, DeviceWall gave New Charter visibility for the first time of what removable media was being connected to the network. This helped the IS team to develop a picture of typical usage and common scenarios which then meant it could create the right security policies for the Group’s needs.

The software tool is being used not only to lock down security but also to change the working culture. Customizable dialogs in DeviceWall make it easy for organizations to communicate with employees and explain why security measures are necessary.

Westwood continued: “Being able to understand what devices were being brought into the office gave us vital insight into where our vulnerabilities lay. This meant that we were able to draw up user policies based on what was actually happening in our own organization, rather than theoretical information. And what’s more, we are now tracking device usage so we can see trends emerging over time – this will help us to spot any suspicious behavior. In terms of the product itself, we’ve been really pleased with how DeviceWall has performed to date. Not only was it very straightforward to deploy but it is simple to use, day in day out, so we can focus on getting on with our job – safeguarding data security.”



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