



Network Security Winner

● This integrator will grow sales by 36% to \$45 million this year – largely due to its expertise in solving network security problems in the education market.

by Chris Loring

Any VAR with experience in the education vertical knows how difficult it can be to properly secure a campus-wide network. Rhode Island's Salve Regina University (Salve) recently faced that type of security challenge and looked to Atrion Networking Corp. to provide a security solution. Atrion is an integrator that specializes in VoIP (voice over Internet Protocol), security, and its own brand of managed services. Atrion is on track to achieve \$45 million in sales this year, a 36% increase over 2007. The innovative nature of Atrion's solutions not only solved Salve's security challenges, it earned the integrator the 2008 *Business Solutions* magazine Channel Innovator Award for network security.

Salve is a private, nonprofit institution founded in 1947. Its 75-acre campus is the temporary home for more than 2,400 students each year. In addition, there are approximately 1,000 staff and faculty members who also access Salve's network. For the first two years of undergraduate study, students are required to live on campus. The security problems occurred when those students took their university-provided laptop computers home during breaks, browsing the Internet outside of the protected network at Salve. When off-campus, those computers were often subjected to Internet threats such as viruses and malware and became infected. When the students returned to the Salve campus, those computers sometimes infected Salve's network. Salve needed to get students back on its network without requiring weeks of IT administration time to fix problems on infected computers.

Salve also faced the increasing threat of endpoint security. For instance, "Most students have iPods, smartphones, USB storage devices, digital cameras, and/or other endpoint devices that are introduced to the network on a regular basis," explains Tim Hebert, CEO of Atrion. "Those devices have the capability to infect the network

with malware just as easily as notebook PCs." Even people visiting students in the dorms could pose threats by introducing digital devices to Salve's network.

With the wide availability to consumers of wireless technologies, file servers, and large storage devices, Salve also had to deal with students who were setting up unauthorized wireless networks and music-sharing file servers within the dorms. The university realized the liability issues it faced as a result of illegal music sharing and other practices such as hosting Web sites on the Salve network. It had to get better control of who was accessing its network.



TIM HEBERT,
CEO

Atrion Networking Corp.

HEADQUARTERS: WARWICK, RI
FOUNDED: 1989
VENDORS: APC, BRADFORD, CISCO, PACKETEER, PANDUIT, RSA
WEB SITE: WWW.ATRION.NET
E-MAIL: INFORM@ATRION.NET

Solve Network Access Challenges With NAC

"There were two ways to look at solving those security problems for Salve," says Hebert. "We could go the old-fashioned route and outsource our staff to help Salve to fix all of the problems

created when students were away from the campus, or we could try to better control network access from a central point on the network. Salve chose the latter by implementing a complete NAC [network access control] solution."

Before Atrion could install any network access controls, it had to redesign Salve's campus network. "Salve had a very flat network [a single IP network address]," explains Hebert. "After some initial consultation, we had to design and implement a hierarchical routed network [more than one IP address] in order to implement NAC. We created a routed network with several subnets. Those subnets allowed us to better divide the network to implement access controls in each network segment." Atrion charged for its assessment, design, and installation services.

Another problem Atrion faced was the heterogeneous (multivendor) network vendor environment Salve had in place. "The network consisted of Cisco, HP, and other vendors' hardware," says Hebert. "We knew that the NAC solution we would recommend had to support Salve's het-



erogeneous network.” Atrion installed the Bradford Networks Campus Manager, an appliance-based solution that provides three key elements of effective network access control: identity management, endpoint compliance, and usage policy enforcement. Campus Manager uses an out-of-band architecture (does not affect network performance) that uses Salve’s existing network infrastructure to provide automated security services — no infrastructure upgrades were required to implement NAC. Atrion also installed a second Campus Manager appliance to provide NAC redundancy. If one Campus Manager appliance fails, the other becomes active without any interruption of services to end users.

Campus Manager automatically identifies authorized Salve users and verifies computer and device configuration compliance before granting network access. If students fail to gain access, Campus Manager provides remediation options so noncompliant students can update their systems themselves. Campus Manager then continuously enforces security policies, records detailed historical data to document network activity, and generates reports for security threat analysis and regulatory compliance.

As a result of Atrion’s NAC implementation, students are no longer able to attach rogue network devices such

as USB drives, PlayStations, and guests’ computers. When students return from breaks, they are notified if their computers are no longer in compliance with Salve’s user policies. Then they are redirected to a ‘quarantine’ network where students can make the required changes without harming the Salve network. “By ensuring

that students’ machines are patched to current levels and have the latest antivirus definitions, we have eliminated 95% of the problems on Salve’s network — equating to one month of time saved by Salve’s IT team every semester,” says Hebert. “The Bradford solution has also eliminated liability issues created by unauthorized network equipment and services added to Salve’s network by students.”

What’s next for Salve? As a result of the success of the NAC project, Atrion is rolling out a VoIP-based phone system for the campus. What’s next for Atrion? The integrator has

developed reproducible network security solutions for the education market. By building reproducible network security solutions, Atrion is focusing on driving even more sales in the education vertical — sales that continue to grow at a 36% pace, making Atrion a sales innovator as well as a channel innovator. ●

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