



CASE STUDY

Claims Management Giant Stays Competitive and Increases Agility with Secure SD-WAN



In 1941, Jim Crawford opened the first Crawford & Company office in Columbus, Georgia. It started as an attempt to make milk truck deliveries more efficient, but the company quickly found its niche in insurance claims handling services and grew to be a global company. Today, the firm’s 9,000 employees are located in 70 countries and provides services in many other countries. Crawford is the world’s largest publicly listed independent provider of claims management and outsourcing solutions to brokers, carriers, and corporations.

Technology is revolutionizing the claims handling industry, and Crawford has been an innovator in the space. This has resulted in the company’s IT footprint growing significantly over the past several years. Adding to the complexity is the need to support more than 150 branch locations around the world.

Reassessing the Network Strategy

Until recently, Crawford utilized a traditional wide-area network (WAN) to connect all its locations using multiprotocol label switching (MPLS) circuits, and SONET ring technology to connect the buildings at the Atlanta-area headquarters campus. In early 2018, the company’s contract with its telecommunications provider was coming up for renewal, and the IT team took this opportunity to review Crawford’s overall strategy for IT networking.

“We realized that disruptions in our industry required a nimbler approach,” explains Hilton Sturisky, Crawford’s global CIO. “Technology is enabling large carriers to process smaller claims themselves, and startups are trying to cut into the business of established players. To remain competitive, we need the agility to provide a value add to our clients without increasing their costs. In short, we want to ensure that we remain relevant for another 77 years.”

Moving Beyond a Costly and Inefficient SONET Ring and Traditional WAN

Sturisky and his team identified three overarching priorities for their network transformation. The first was to build a global network centrally managed from headquarters. A second priority was to improve cybersecurity protections in the face of a threat landscape that is becoming increasingly complex, as well as compliance requirements resulting from tighter regulations on the use of personal information.

“We were able to get rid of the ring, and that easily brought us a seven-figure annual savings.”

*– Hilton Sturisky, Global CIO,
Crawford & Company*

Details

Customer: Crawford & Company

Industry: Insurance Claims Management

Location: Peachtree Corners, Georgia, USA

The third priority was to achieve scalability to meet emerging customer expectations. “Innovation is transforming our industry in terms of how we serve our customers,” Sturisky relates. “For example, Internet of Things (IoT), telematics, and our ability to integrate with our customers’ systems make it possible for us to know when a car is in an accident in real time—before a claim is filed. Another new trend is for site visits to be made by junior adjusters, who livestream their inspections back to the senior adjuster working at his or her desk. We need to be ready to support these new customer requirements as they come.”

It was clear to Sturisky and his team that Crawford’s existing MPLS infrastructure and SONET ring were not agile enough to meet these needs. Plus, they were very expensive. “The cost for the ring, in particular, was substantial, and it was not the most efficient way to connect our headquarters buildings,” Sturisky asserts. “Furthermore, the added MPLS bandwidth that would have been required to achieve the agility and scale that our business needed would have been both expensive and time-consuming.”

Sturisky’s team ultimately decided that the SONET ring needed to go, but that they wanted roughly the same amount of MPLS capacity with the new provider as with the legacy carrier—but no more. Instead, Crawford would scale their network capacity using the public internet with emerging software-defined WAN (SD-WAN) technology.

Selecting a Secure SD-WAN Solution

Sturisky’s team conducted proofs of concept (POCs) with several vendors for SD-WAN solutions as a part of the larger effort to find the best telecommunications and networking solution for the company. “We realized that SD-WAN technology would enable us to use MPLS circuits for the majority of our traffic while supplementing that capacity over the public internet.”

Crawford ultimately selected a proposal from Fortinet Partner Tricade Technology Solutions that included Fortinet Secure SD-WAN—which combines FortiGate next-generation firewalls (NGFWs) with best-of-breed SD-WAN networking in a single offering. “We liked its ease of use at the scale at which we operate,” Sturisky recalls. “Just as importantly, we were impressed with the high level of security that is built into Fortinet Secure SD-WAN. The other solutions we looked at would have required us to add a third-party security tool.”

Deploying a New Network Infrastructure

Part of a larger project to retire legacy MPLS circuits in favor of new infrastructure from Verizon, the contract with Tricade Technology Solutions for the Fortinet Secure SD-WAN solution was finalized. In addition to the Secure SD-WAN solution, Crawford opted to purchase FortiManager and FortiAnalyzer to help the network and security teams with management, reporting, and analytics. Sturisky’s team also purchased the FortiGate Unified Threat Protection bundle, which includes a broad set of security services and FortiCare 24x7 support.

Tricade arranged for deployment support for the Fortinet solution by Fortinet Partner Layer 3 Communications. “As we turned on the Verizon circuits at each location, we also turned on Fortinet Secure SD-WAN at the same time,” Sturisky notes. “We started with our data centers and the headquarters campus, and we then moved to branch offices in the U.S. We’re currently turning out two sites per day and have completed approximately 75. We expect to finish the U.S. within the first six months and global locations in less than a year.”

Business Impact

- Seven-figure cost savings by eliminating ring network at headquarters
- 30% savings by adding additional bandwidth
- Time to roll up a new network connection reduced from weeks to minutes
- Significant cost savings in rolling out NAC solution globally vs. legacy solution
- Staff efficiency savings through automated reporting and analytics
- Ability to scale operations in a specific geography after a natural disaster, without paying for unused bandwidth at other times

Solutions

- Fortinet Secure SD-WAN
- FortiManager
- FortiAnalyzer
- FortiNAC

Fortinet Partners

- Tricade Technology Solutions
- Layer 3 Communications

Adding Network Access Control

As implementation has progressed, the cybersecurity team at Crawford opted to add another Fortinet offering, the FortiNAC network access control solution. “As we move to a software-defined networking strategy, it makes sense to integrate security with access control at our branches,” Sturisky explains.

Crawford had a legacy NAC solution in place, but it was rather cumbersome and was not going to work for deployment beyond the U.S. “After a fair amount of work, we got that tool working well for us, but expanding it globally was going to be cost prohibitive,” Sturisky recalls. “We liked FortiNAC’s integration with the SD-WAN solution and its ability to provide visibility into and control over our growing network of IoT devices. We plan to deploy it globally in short order.”

Deploying Fortinet Secure SD-WAN along with FortiNAC is a step toward the consolidation of security protection to the network edge with the Fortinet SD-Branch solution. “We are looking at piloting such a solution in the near future,” Sturisky says.

Achieving Scalability and Agility

Even though the deployment of Secure SD-WAN is still in progress, Crawford is already seeing big benefits from the new infrastructure, and is expecting significant efficiencies and cost savings and avoidance from its network transformation.

One benefit is the flexibility to scale network capacity with agility. “We no longer have to roll up new MPLS bandwidth to scale our operations,” Sturisky says. “While we maintain approximately the same MPLS capacity as we had before, we can now scale to whatever level our business requires using the SD-WAN technology.”

Beginning to See Big Operational Efficiencies

“The result is that we will save nearly 30% in networking cost when we add additional capacity,” Sturisky continues. “And on the operational side, it now takes our team just minutes to modify network connections, compared with several weeks when securing additional MPLS bandwidth. This helps me redeploy significant staff time and prevents business delays while bandwidth is added.”

FortiManager and FortiAnalyzer are also making the lives of both the network and security teams much easier. “Our team is extremely small for a company our size,” Sturisky states. “The ability to have a single management console and automated reporting and analysis was a major factor in selecting Fortinet. Compliance reporting is much easier. And beyond compliance, we are able to demonstrate that we meet the even higher standards of our customers.”

In addition, the reporting capabilities support the company’s robust security roadmap, which is based on National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) standards. “The robust reporting fits nicely with the Identify, Detect, Protect, Respond, Recover sequence,” Sturisky notes.

The ability to scale capacity up and down is another benefit in a world where Crawford must be nimble or risk losing business. “Optimizing our WAN with Fortinet, coupled with dynamic bandwidth-on-demand with the new network, allows site-specific bandwidth changes in real time,” Sturisky notes. “This allows us to scale as needed when dealing with large-scale claim-demand from a specific geography—as with a natural disaster—but not have to pay for the bandwidth when it is not needed.”

Realizing Seven-figure Cost Savings and Avoidance

The global rollout of FortiNAC will enable Crawford to avoid the exorbitant cost of rolling out their legacy NAC solution worldwide. And since FortiNAC enables global protection that was not feasible before, Crawford will enjoy an enhanced security posture at a time when visibility into global network access is critical for protecting the company’s assets.

“We realized that disruptions in our industry required a more nimble approach.”

– Hilton Sturisky, Global CIO,
Crawford & Company

“As we move to a software-defined networking strategy, it makes sense to integrate security with access control at our branches.”

– Hilton Sturisky, Global CIO,
Crawford & Company

But by far the biggest saving is from the elimination of the SONET ring at the headquarters campus. “Our new network infrastructure and the SD-WAN capabilities meant that we were able to get rid of the ring, and that easily brought us a seven-figure annual savings,” Sturisky reports.

A Valuable Partnership

As deployment moves forward quickly and efficiently, Sturisky is pleased with the agility, flexibility, and efficiency of the new infrastructure. “While the transition to Verizon was much more visible, our partnership with Fortinet, Tricade, and Layer 3 Communications has been a critical part of this project,” Sturisky concludes. “The ability to be agile and scale operations in real time is going to be more and more important in the coming years. I am very pleased with the technology and the support of Fortinet and its partners.”



www.fortinet.com