

CASE STUDY

IHG Hotels & Resorts Boosts IT Efficiency Close to 60% with Fortinet Secure SD-WAN

InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG Hotels & Resorts) is an international hotel group headquartered in Windsor, England. The company operates 6,164 hotels globally, with an additional 1,859 in the development stage. The group comprises 325,000 employees and 18 brands, including Six Senses, Crowne Plaza, and Holiday Inn.

The Security Challenges of Hospitality

As a hospitality business, IHG faces a specific set of challenges regarding cybersecurity. Malvin Eanes, Hotel Security Compliance Director at IHG, explains: “Hotel guests stay in our properties for an extended period of time, which leads to a heightened security risk as it gives bad actors more opportunities to break into our network. Another key challenge is the size and variety of our technology ecosystems, which include everything from parking and key-card systems to check-in systems, all of which are managed by different vendors.”

The sheer size of IHG’s operation is also a challenge. For Eanes, each one of the company’s 6,164 hotels is essentially its own data center, requiring individual management and oversight. This task was made all the harder by its legacy infrastructure, which did not allow for centralized system management.

“Our legacy network was a traditional hub-and-spoke model running over MPLS lines. This architecture was not designed to operate on the scale we have reached, nor was it built to deliver off-premises or hosted solutions like Software-as-a-Service applications, which is the direction we are moving in. We had outgrown our infrastructure,” says Eanes.

Eanes cites high bandwidth costs, network bottlenecks, complex orchestration, and an inability to meet cloud and mobile requirements as key weaknesses in the organization’s legacy infrastructure, along with a lack of visibility and a suboptimal security posture.

Deploying the Fortinet Secure SD-WAN Solution

IHG’s IT team realized that the best evolutionary path to meet its bandwidth, cost, and security goals would be to deploy a software-defined wide area network (SD-WAN). “Technology solutions need to bring added value to our guests at our properties, and SD-WAN meets both our cost requirements and business objectives,” says Eanes.

The company initiated a rigorous selection process, during which Fortinet kept coming up. Eanes invited Fortinet to take part in a range of proof-of-concept (POC) trials. “We brought in different business stakeholders to determine what we truly needed in the near term versus everything we initially thought we wanted. We asked ourselves: How will this improve services for our guests? How will it improve our security posture? And how does this improve performance or enhance our operations?”



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Malvin Eanes
Hotel Security
Compliance Director
IHG Hotels & Resorts

Details

Customer: IHG Hotels & Resorts

Industry: IHG Hotels & Resorts

Headquarters Location: U.K.

Number of Secure SD-WAN

Locations: 4,000

Business Impact

- 15-month deployment, thanks to centralized management
- Forecast cost reductions of 25%
- Forecast team efficiency boost of 60%

Today, IHG is in the process of a global rollout of the Fortinet Secure SD-WAN solution at thousands of its global locations, delivered by a managed security service provider (MSSP). The solution comprises FortiGate Next-Generation Firewalls (NGFWs), FortiManager, and FortiAnalyzer.

The Right Performance and Security at the Right Cost

Reducing cost was a key criterion of success for IHG, and it is one that they have been able to meet by partnering with Fortinet. “The convergence of networking and security as part of Fortinet’s Secure SD-WAN solution met our requirements,” says Eanes. The company expects to reduce costs by 25% through the solution and is already seeing early savings emerge.

Significantly, the group is cutting costs while also driving performance improvements. Using Fortinet technology out of the box, the company has unlocked a 30% drop in round-trip latency, which it expects to improve further once it has configured the devices. Through these and other performance improvements, IHG expects that the Fortinet Secure SD-WAN solution will enable a 30% uplift in user satisfaction.

The company will also benefit from an improvement to its overall security posture, thanks to the advanced threat detection and proactive threat blocking capabilities that come with the Fortinet Secure SD-WAN. This is helping the company accelerate its move to cloud and mobile applications. IHG also benefits from a Security-as-a-Service approach, whereby the latest security features are kept continually updated.

Improving Efficiency and Control

Another goal of the transformation was to improve deployment speed to hotels. This has been achieved, with the deployment taking just 15 months. From this point on, ongoing efficiencies will be realized through the centralized management pane delivered by the FortiManager solution. “Fortinet provides me with a high-level view of what is going on at the property level from a security, infrastructure, network, and bandwidth perspective,” says Eanes. “Using FortiManager and FortiAnalyzer, I am able to utilize all my toolsets and bring everything together centrally.”

Eanes gives the example of a simple patch: “Before Fortinet, the patch would need to be implemented individually on each of the hotel’s systems. With Fortinet, I can run a complete audit with one click. This helps reduce the demands on my team’s time and helps me understand my environment, which ultimately means improved service for our guests.” IHG predicts that Fortinet will drive 60% efficiency benefits for the company’s network and security team.

Plans for the Future

Looking ahead, IHG hopes to build out on the Fortinet Security Fabric, providing efficient deployment of consistent security across hotel ecosystems. Once the Fortinet Secure SD-WAN is fully up and running, the company will review other Fortinet solutions, including the FortiEDR endpoint detection and response solution, FortiAP access points, and FortiSwitch secure Ethernet switches. “We are looking for a company that wants to understand our business so we can grow together. This is what we are getting from Fortinet so far, and I look forward to that continuing in the future,” Eanes concludes.

Business Impact (cont.)

- Forecast end-user satisfaction uplift of 30%
- Reduced round-trip latency 30% out of the box
- Improved security posture
- Better able to meet cloud and mobile application requirements

Solutions

- Fortinet Secure SD-WAN
- FortiGate Next-Generation Firewall
- FortiManager
- FortiAnalyzer

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