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IT Vortex Leverages Pay-as-You-Go Enterprise Security for the Ultimate Cloud Flex

Cloud service provider IT Vortex leverages security to set itself apart. "Our clients come to us for a turnkey solution," explains Lou Corriero, Vice President of Business Development. "We offer them hardware, maintenance, and software licensing. And then, what differentiates us as a cloud provider is the security that we layer on top of that turnkey solution. We built our company strategy on securing customers from the endpoint to the client site to the cloud."

The firm serves small to midsize businesses across a range of industries, including manufacturing, legal, utilities providers, and healthcare. Most are based in the United States, although some have operations overseas as well. The IT Vortex cloud-hosting platform runs on a VMware stack in two U.S. data centers. To serve its multinational customers, the firm provides virtual desktops, virtual private networks (VPNs), and software-defined wide-area networking (SD-WAN). Since 2008, IT Vortex has been leveraging Fortinet solutions to keep its clients' data, information, and users secure.

"FortiGate firewalls are protecting our own multitenant infrastructure, as well as securing each client's cloud presence," Corriero says. "We layer multiple security products on top of one another, in order to consistently provide cutting-edge technology to help our clients meet their cybersecurity and compliance goals."

Why Fortinet?

Many VMware-based service providers exclusively use VMware toolsets. However, IT Vortex leadership saw several benefits of layering on a third-party solution. For one thing, a successful cyberattack would be disastrous for the business—so, the more protection it can provide, the better.

"We have seen a couple of managed service providers and cloud service providers that experienced breaches," Corriero says. "That emphasized the importance of having a solid strategy for threat containment and remediation. Fortinet has always remained a step or two ahead, which is key for us. We have been using Fortinet solutions for 14 years, and (knock on wood) we have not had a single breach that was due to Fortinet policies or filtering."

IT Vortex clients can leverage Fortinet's intrusion prevention system (IPS), DNS filtering, data loss prevention (DLP), and other capabilities. "One of the key factors in our selection of Fortinet was the ability to do a Layer 2 IPsec VPN," Corriero says. "That enables us to stretch across their subnets with minimal impact to them and additional security. The web filtering provides massive value as well since it often displaces other costly competitors that clients may have had in place."

Ease of management also played into the decision to partner with Fortinet. "The FortiGate Next-Generation Firewalls integrate tightly with the VMware platform," Corriero says. "They are a natural extension of the VMware stack, yet they are robust and capable firewalls. And the Fortinet management tools give us much more granular control of security than what is available through products built into VMware."

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SIMPLIFY. PROTECT. EVOLVE.

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– Lou Corriero, Vice President of Business Development, IT Vortex

Details

Customer: IT Vortex

Industry: MSSP/Service Provider

Headquarters: Paramus, New Jersey

Business Impact

- Highly secure cloud platform— no security breaches due to Fortinet policies or filtering

- Additional business opportunity, as clients want to expand Fortinet presence onto their premises

- Predictable and transparent billing, with usage points available for purchase in 12-, 36-, or 60-month increments

Multilayered, Multifaceted Protection

Now, every customer in the IT Vortex cloud has at least one dedicated FortiGate virtual firewall filtering its north-south traffic. IT Vortex also uses FortiGate-VM NGFWs for microsegmentation, filtering east-west traffic to isolate resources in case of a breach.

"New clients often question what other security they can layer on," Corriero says. "So, we go into the security profiles and show them all the different application fingerprints that we can block. Many of our clients come from very disparate security environments, and the FortiGate devices displace a lot of other individual products." Depending on clients' needs, IT Vortex can deploy additional solutions in the Fortinet Security Fabric, as well. The clients achieve single-pane-of-glass management, and the solutions communicate in case of a security event "so if there's a breach over in one business unit's server, this port can be blocked automatically if that is how the client has defined the policy," Corriero says.

In fact, Corriero adds, clients are frequently so impressed with the Fortinet-based cloud infrastructure that they ask IT Vortex to replace their on-premises IT infrastructure with Fortinet solutions. "We see a progression," Corriero says. "After the firewalls comes more infrastructure like switching and then sometimes access points. Because they really love the bundled features and ease of management."

The IT Vortex team uses FortiManager to manage the Fortinet solutions. "We get a holistic view of our environment," Corriero says. "And as Fortinet comes out with security updates and patches, we push those out through FortiManager. We schedule them according to each client's downtime tolerance, so we keep things up to date and ensure everything is unified across a client's security infrastructure. For example, if they wanted to block a certain application, we could do that in a single location and push the policy to all their firewalls at once. It saves us a significant amount of time, and it reduces the chances of an error."

At the same time, he continues, "we get reports from FortiManager and FortiAnalyzer. The reports can go out to any of the client users or systems. Some clients want to review them; some pull the data into a SIEM [security information and event management] tool or a log analyzer, so we provide that granular level of options to them. Other clients do not need that data and request us to monitor it. Whether or not the client gets reports, our team goes through the logs, looking into any alerts—that is where the Fortinet management tools are so helpful. Across all the transactions in just one of our data centers, we have millions of events every minute. To manually have eyes on all that would be very difficult. But all that data is being logged and filtered and brought back to FortiManager and FortiAnalyzer," which respond according to the policies IT Vortex has established.

Lean, Mean, and Efficient Approach to Billing

The other way in which IT Vortex attempts to simplify customers' lives is in the billing for its cloud services. "Other providers tend to 'a la carte' customers to death," Corriero says. "They are initially quoted one price, but then they have sticker shock when they get the bill and see everything else that was added on. IT Vortex offers our cloud service in a flat rate that we calculate up front, and that pricing does not change unless the customer intentionally adds more services."

To support its predictable and transparent billing model, IT Vortex transitioned to the Fortinet Flex-VM subscription model for all its FortiGate VMs. The program is available on either an annual or multiyear basis. Fortinet partners can pay as they go or purchase a pre-paid subscription and Fortinet customers can only purchase pre-paid subscriptions. These subscriptions provide access to consumption points that are charged when VMs and security services are used.

Solutions

- FortiGate Next-Generation Firewall

- FortiManager

- FortiAnalyzer

- FortiAP

- FortiSwitch

Services

- Flex-VM Subscription Model

"Every generation of FortiGate NGFWs has brought better performance and more advanced feature sets. And the Flex-VM billing model has been highly beneficial to our business. Being able to consume resources on the fly enables us to keep our operations lean, mean, and efficient."

– Lou Corriero, Vice President of Business Development, IT Vortex

"For every firewall, our spend in terms of consumption points is based on the number of CPUs and VDOMS [virtual domain object models] in the firewall and the features that the firewall is using," Corriero says. Fortinet reconciles the usage charges daily, and the IT Vortex team see their actual points usage across each individual firewall via the Fortinet support portal.

"We can see our total consumption points, what has been deducted, whether we have used more than our prepay amount for the year, and what the difference is at the end of the month," Corriero explains. "Having metered usage detailed for each firewall enables us to understand what resources each client is consuming and how they are consuming them. We then pay only for what we are using, and we can immediately spin up VMs and firewalls whenever we need them. We set their billing rate in advance based on Fortinet resource calculators, and then we transparently pass along the cost of those resources."

The first year that IT Vortex used the Flex-VM subscription model, the firm paid for consumption at the end of the month. But this year, the organization prepaid, to gain the discount and reduce complexity. "We have seen where our spend is," Corriero reports. "We let it run for a year and got a good idea of our usage. Now, we are confident to prepay up front and be done with it for the year. We pay only for what we are using, and we can immediately spin up VMs and firewalls whenever we need them."

An Evolving Partnership

After nearly a decade and a half as a Fortinet partner, IT Vortex still sees room to expand the relationship. "We are about to start offering the SOC [security operations center] as a service add-on, which just became available in the Flex-VM program," Corriero says. "That is a full, Fortinet-managed SOC service that will act in parallel with our own event monitoring. It will provide a second layer of alerts if there is some type of anomalous activity and will give our clients even more eyes on the logging and events management."

"We started IT Vortex on the concept of using firewalls as both physical devices on-premises and a cloud gateway for each tenant," Corriero says. "That is something we plan to continue to carry out for all our clients. People love the fact that they are getting an enterprise firewall in the cloud that is a dedicated appliance for them alone. They can log in and manage the firewall or co-manage it with us. They can turn resources on as they need them, and they can grow and scale.

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