Howden Joinery Group secures remote access with Barracuda Networks

Large nationwide businesses are more likely to have significant numbers of senior staff who are frequently on the move. Howdens is no different, with area managers and other senior staff spending much of their time travelling between the company's hundreds of depots and to their customers in the building trade.

"The capital outlay on Barracuda's technology is quickly paying itself back through huge reductions in time IT staff spend on managing email security, as well as the increased productivity for staff working remotely. It has reduced our reliance on VPNs."

Ru Gardner
Howden's Security Team

To maximise their productivity, Howdens' senior management need reliable remote access to their emails. Furthermore, they have to ensure that this access is fully secure, and that web applications such as email are protected from malicious attacks, and can only be accessed by legitimate users.

Howdens had, for some time, been using a content filtering device, employed as a reverse proxy server, to protect its webmail applications from malicious external online attacks. Although this was generally effective at its primary purpose it was far from satisfactory, as **Ru Gardner** of *Howdens' Security Team* explains.

"Our legacy system did the job of protecting our Outlook Web App from the intrusion of malware, but it caused us a major management headache," says Gardener. "Quite simply, it was vastly over-engineered for the job of acting as our web application firewall, and was too costly, complex and time-consuming to manage and configure, especially given the wide variety of smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices used by senior employees".

Our business relies on email, so downtime is unacceptable. Remote workers need to be in contact with suppliers and customers at all times, as well as our IT staff who ensure optimal webmail performance at the backend. Our employees increasingly found themselves using a virtual private network (VPN) to access their email securely on the go, but this required staff to log in every time they wanted to check their mail, which was far from ideal. Meanwhile at the backend, maintaining the security of the webmail applications was a constant strain on IT resources and threatened to become unmanageable.

The solution: Web Application Firewall from Barracuda Networks Howdens chose Barracuda Networks' Web Application Firewall (WAF) for the job of securing its webmail from external threats and ensuring that only trusted devices could access company's online email system.

The company installed two Barracuda WAF 660 appliances: one installed in the primary and one in the secondary datacentre.

These firewalls ensure that all incoming traffic to its webmail applications is screened for malicious attacks, such as hackers attempting to exploit vulnerabilities to steal sensitive data contained in emails.

All email traffic passing through the firewalls uses the HTTPS protocol, providing secure, encrypted communication between remote workers and their webmail servers. The appliances handle traffic from around 160 employees who use the Outlook Web App (OWA) to access emails from remote desktops, and over 130 users of Microsoft's ActiveSync protocol for handheld devices, used predominantly by senior management, area managers and IT staff.

Barracuda's appliances monitor all traffic passing between its web applications and remote devices, as well as providing reports about attackers and attack attempts. A whitelist of all staff smartphones is kept on the devices to ensure that only recognised and approved hardware may successfully connect with company webmail systems.

Assuring modern, manageable and secure mobile email Howdens legacy content filtering system was only ever effective for logging onto Outlook Web App for webmail, and was very difficult to configure effectively for mobile devices using ActiveSync.

Barracuda's firewall appliances now ensure that Howdens' management has secure, reliable access to email, wherever they are and no matter what device they use.

"While the assurance that email will be a reliable tool has been a boom for the company's field workers, the effect on IS staff has also been significant with greatly reduced complexity in both support and maintenance processes," says Gardner.

"It's a relief to know that we have the technology in place to protect webmail access on all devices used across Howdens' operations," he continues. "Rather than being a source of occasional frustration for senior management, and the bane of the IT department, remote email is now a trusted and reliable function."

The Barracuda firewall's intuitive, real-time interface enables Howdens' IT staff to manage and monitor email access across its networks; add email functionality to any new mobile device without difficulty; and ensure that they always know that legitimate devices are connecting safely with the company's webmail.

"The installation process was smooth and quick, with our new Web Application Firewalls plugging simply into both our datacentres," says Gardner. "We were also appreciative that Barracuda took the time to understand our needs; recommended technology that was perfectly suited to our requirements; and provided expert, helpful and friendly support when required.

About Evolve Secure Solutions

Evolve Secure Solutions Ltd is a specialist provider of storage, security and infrastructure services and solutions to enterprises. Founded by individuals with over a decades experience within the IT industry, Evolve deliver a proven and innovative portfolio of products and services to leading UK corporate customers within financial and professionals services, retail and manufacturing.

With a core of top level vendor accreditation and strong delivery processes based on Prince 2 and ITIL best practice, Evolve has established long standing relationships with its clients to help deliver high value IT solutions. To help its clients meet the challenges of modern business process

and to improve flexibility, Evolve has an extensive solutions portfolio that can be delivered via the use of on-site IT, hosted applications and remotely managed services.

For more information, please visit www.evolvesecuresolutions.com

About Barracuda Networks Inc.

Barracuda Networks Inc. combines premise-based gateways and software, cloud services, and sophisticated remote support to deliver comprehensive security, networking and storage solutions. The company's expansive product portfolio includes offerings for protection against email, Web and IM threats as well as products that improve application delivery and network access, message archiving, backup and data protection.

For more information, please visit www.barracudanetworks.com.

About Howden Joinery Group

Howden Joinery Group PLC is the parent company of Howdens Joinery, a leading supplier of kitchens and joinery to trade customers across the UK.

Howdens enables builders to sell, design, install and finish jobs quickly and profitably. The company employs over 6,000 staff and operates from over 500 depots around the UK. Since 1995, Howdens has grown into a company with a turnover of circa £800m, and each year supplies around 250,000 building trade professionals with around three and a half million kitchen cabinets, two million doors and 400,000 complete kitchens.