

When a leading regional logistics company wanted to secure its IT and communications systems it found the case for open source compelling.



As with many fast growing businesses, Task Force had focussed strongly on customer needs, and developing the supporting IT infrastructure had tended to take a backseat. Taking on their first IT manager, George Nursey, last year, the company recognised a need to take IT provision and information security more seriously. The importance of this was forcibly brought home to senior management when, in George Nursey's first week, the company's outdated firewall was successfully hacked.

The new IT manager had quite a few things on his plate – as well as the need to upgrade the firewall protection and improve disaster recovery, the company wanted to use VPN technology to implement a WAN and allow mobile workers access to company systems, and to set-up an online booking system for customers. Not to mention addressing a growing issue with spam!

Key requirements for the new security system were high availability, to secure the planned online customer booking system, and ease of configuration and management to make the most of Nursey's time. But the available budget was limited. "I needed security software that was both feature-rich and affordable," said Nursey. "Going with open source gave us the answer." The open source and Linux based system that George chose, from Astaro AG, cost approximately one-third of the cost of a proprietary system with equivalent features.



Task Force has established a strong reputation for meeting its clients' logistics needs, from managing an entire logistics operation on behalf of a client to offering nationwide delivery on a single item. Headquartered in Witham and with operational centres in Cambridge and the Docklands. Task Force also works within a national group of logistics suppliers to cover the rest of the UK. Task Force has a mobile sales force, and as a warehousing company, has offices across a large operating region. However as a SME, the company has limited IT personnel to install, configure and manage security systems.

Task Force selected Bastion IT, a value-added reseller based in Gateshead, to compare a range of proprietary solutions to the Astaro open source based solution. Nursey was aware that although some 'industry standard firewalls' were available at a lower price point, these lacked management features, needing IT staff to put a lot of time in to achieve good performance and so giving a higher total cost of ownership (TCO). Leading proprietary software such as Check Point was much more expensive than the Astaro offering.

Task Force trialled Astaro, taking advantage of the free 30-day evaluation period. They were able to run Astaro alongside their existing firewall. Nursey was immediately impressed with the way the user interface worked, it was several steps ahead of what he had expected for the price. "It's so good it would almost make sense to a lay person!" he said.

Nursey could also see enormous benefits in Astaro's ability to function as a self-contained entity, automatically updating its software with changes, such as patches. He now uses the Up2date management system to get notification of performance and security incidents by text message on his mobile. "The whole Up2date system is so worthwhile," he commented. "I am now able to keep informed on the system while on the move, and decide when I need to take any actions." The system also automatically provides configuration back-ups on a daily basis. In further tests, Nursey found that in the event of a full disaster recovery scenario he could have the security systems back up within 20 minutes.



Aware that Linux and open source software are in the early stages of corporate uptake, Nursey did his due diligence in examining the product. "I looked closely at the way the Linux kernel was built and I was very comfortable with it." He also notes that with the open source model any security breaches get resolved faster than with proprietary systems, where fewer developers are available to produce a security patch. The firewall went live in three sites in July 2003, and Nursey is happy to report that he has not had a single problem with the protection provided. "Bastion has been great to work with, providing excellent service throughout. I've really appreciated their advice", he added. Task Force also has a support agreement with Bastion to look after the Task Force network as required, either on site or remotely.

Lee Redmayne, director at Bastion IT said: "For VARs, Astaro offers an opportunity to sell a sophisticated and comprehensive integrated solution, but one which is easy to install and configure. Astaro also helps resellers to build ongoing relationships with customers, through support agreements and the ability to offer further software applications from the Astaro suite as required."



Since deploying Astaro's firewall, Task Force has gone on to implement a WAN and given mobile workers dial-up access to the company's systems through Astaro's VPN gateway. Task Force recognised the productivity and communications benefits that could

be achieved and has been impressed with the ease with which the improvements have been delivered. Sales people now use a Sentinel VPN client on their laptops to set up a secure tunnel over the internet to the Astaro firewall and VPN gateway, allowing them remote access to email and company databases.

Task Force also implemented Astaro's anti-spam solution. The firewall, VPN gateway software and spam protection application are all best-of-breed open source applications that Astaro has pre-integrated on a hardened Linux core.

Nursey explained: "We had been blocking spam at the mailserver, but group email addresses were still getting hit – and the levels were increasing. When I looked at the Astaro product, I was very impressed with their content filtering. Now it's in place, our spam filtering is about 95% efficient – a massive improvement."

At the beginning of March, Task Force went live with the online booking system for its customers. The new system allows customers to enter jobs live into the Task Force computer system and to view the status of their jobs. The project ran smoothly and met its deadline. Astaro's firewall plays a key part in the solution, securing access to live company databases over the internet. Task Force runs a webserver in a 'demilitarised zone' within the firewall, which then talks to a Sequel server inside the network. Nursey reports: "The take-up from customers has been great, and the systems have performed well. There have been no problems. As an IT manager, I have been able to focus on delivering value to the business through improved customer relationships, while good security has been very straight forward to manage with the Astaro integrated software solution."

Nursey is looking forward to Astaro's soon to be released Version 5: "We'll be able to get valuable intrusion protection and a lot more functionality," he said.

Astaro

Astaro develops a complete line of network security products including the Astaro Security Gateway line of security appliances and Astaro Security Linux, a software-based solution. All Astaro products offer six critical security applications - firewall, VPN gateway, anti-virus, intrusion protection, spam filtering and content filtering - fully integrated on a single management platform.

The company is headquartered in Burlington, Mass. and Karlsruhe, Germany. Astaro's software has won numerous industry awards, and is protecting over 20,000 networks in 60 countries, including such organizations as Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Los Alamos National Labs, Stanford University and Watsco, Inc. Astaro products are distributed by a worldwide network of 350 solutions partners who offer local support and services.

Further information: <http://www.astaro.com>