Global Education Network Relies on WatchGuard to Connect Securely

Overview
Country or Region: Lebanon
Industry: Education

Company Profile
SABIS is a global education management organization.

Business Situation
This vast and growing network of schools needed reliable and secure VPN connectivity, flexible web content filtering, and strong intrusion prevention to protect confidential student data.

Solution
WatchGuard Unified Threat Management (UTM) solution

Benefits
- All locations are securely connected by VPNs.
- Students are protected from harmful content.
- Educators can safely access tools needed to teach effectively.
- Sensitive data is well protected.
- IT saves time and money with highly efficient centralized management.

"The key benefits of the solution are the high security now prevalent in the work environment and the VPN communication among branches. We can now provide speedy support to our branches through the direct VPN connection and save time through strong centralized management capabilities."

—Raymond Khoury, Information Technology Infrastructure Leader

Background
SABIS® is a global education management organization that is distinguished by a 124-year track record (dating back to 1884) in the operation of Pre-K and K–12 schools. The mission of SABIS is to support its network of schools with educational solutions, enabling them to provide their students with high-quality education for a changing world.

The SABIS Educational Services S.A.L. was established in Beirut, Lebanon in 1993, as the managing arm of the SABIS School Network and was entrusted with the responsibility of developing the network in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. SABIS Educational Services S.A.L. operates schools in Africa, the Gulf, Near East, North Africa East, and Asia and two corporate offices located in Lebanon and the United States of America (USA).

Challenge

SABIS Educational Services S.A.L's well-reputed global network is vast. It consists of 77 schools and one university in 15 countries handling over 60,000 students, some 200 employees in Lebanon, and 4,500 globally. The task for Raymond Khoury, Information technology (IT) Infrastructure Team Leader at SABIS Educational Services S.A.L., was to make sure students are protected from harmful content, educators have access to the tools they need, and that the network runs as smoothly as possible.

In addition, SABIS Educational Services S.A.L. operates 75 global offices running 4,000 desktops. Considering this extensive network, Khoury required a network security solution that provided granular control while being easy to manage. With several different user groups requiring varying degrees of access to network, it was essential that Khoury had the ability to apply specific rules to various users and user groups while maintaining a healthy network. Key challenges included safe-guarding the wireless network, maintaining bandwidth, voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) and video-conferencing facilities.

The WatchGuard Solution

Like other K-12 school areas, the SABIS Educational Services S.A.L. had to protect their network from external threats, as well as the risk of unauthorized intrusions by users within the network. In 2006,

Khoury began discussions with SECOR, the WatchGuard reseller in Lebanon, on deploying the complete suite of WatchGuard's UTM (unified threat management) products.

SABIS Educational Services S.A.L's IT department was looking for these key features in their network security solutions such as protection for the virtual private network (VPN) Tunnel, Mobile User VPN (MUVPN), Webblocker and high protection through security policies across the central management server. The solution chosen by SECOR was the WatchGuard Firebox® X Core™ unit, with a full UTM suite including Gateway AntiVirus protection, Intrusion Prevention Service, spamBlocker, and most importantly, the WebBlocker service.

The second suggested solution was the Firebox X Peak™ 8500e-F, which is specifically designed for complex networks and data centers, and provides multi-gigabit performance and Ethernet interfaces with fiber interface support. They also provide application-based proxy inspection, branch office and mobile user VPN capabilities, and spam attack prevention to deliver a much higher level of security for protection.

The SABIS Educational Services S.A.L's IT department keenly followed the instructions provided in the installation kit to configure the provided WatchGuard. Soon enough, the cutover was complete.

"The working experience with SECOR was rewarding. The team responded to our queries on the spot and provided us with all the necessary assistance. This coupled with easy interface and efficient product suite, was the perfect match," concluded Khoury.

Benefits

The number one benefit that the SABIS Educational Services S.A.L has experienced from the WatchGuard solution is increased security, from both external and internal threats. The school's three main concerns were protecting sensitive data, ensuring safe communication among branches and providing remote access for telecommuters – all areas in which WatchGuard UTM solutions excel.

- High Security

  The configured WatchGuard WebBlocker service disallows categories of sites that are obvious concerns, plus individual sites that are outside the educational purpose. The service was set up to return a web page informing the user of the block, with instructions to contact the SABIS Educational Services S.A.L's IT department for access.

- VPN Protection

  S.A.L's employees would occasionally work from home, connecting to the network through a VPN connection. The Firebox X Peak™ 8500e-F provides VPN protection as well as an easy-to-use user interface and comprehensive reporting features, which allow the IT department to

view network usage at the user and user group level. "The key benefits of the solution are the high security now prevalent in the work environment and the VPN communication among branches. We can now provide speedy support to our branches through the direct VPN connection and save time through strong centralized management capabilities," said Khoury.

- Strong Support

  This was also a major selling point in the eyes of the SABIS Educational Services S.A.L's IT department. "The working experience with SECOR was rewarding. The team responded to our queries on the spot and provided us with all the necessary assistance. This coupled with easy interface and efficient product suite, was the perfect match," concluded Khoury.

For more information on WatchGuard network security solutions, visit www.watchguard.com.