

College Graduates to Palo Alto Networks Next-Generation Firewall

“Since replacing our old firewalls with the PA Series, we can monitor users at a level not possible before and set and enforce more effective policies, which protects our users and networks.”

—Chris Duffy, CIO, Peirce College

BACKGROUND

Founded in 1865, Peirce College is a private, four-year, specialized institution providing practical, leading edge curricula primarily to working adult learners. National in scope, and international reach, flexible scheduling, outstanding student services and three delivery systems (on campus, on site and online) are key elements in Peirce’s continued success in meeting its historical commitment to maximizing student and employer opportunity in the 21st century.

BALANCING ACT: LEARNING WITH SECURITY

As an educational institution, Peirce College is committed to fostering an environment of academic freedom in which cutting-edge research and learning is promoted. However, the school must balance its mission with the imperative to protect its staff and students. Allowing unfettered online access to information, while simultaneously protecting itself from increasingly sophisticated cyber threats, posed a major challenge for the college.

Over time, Peirce College’s IT environment consisting of dual Cisco PIX Series Firewalls and Packeteer PacketShaper (now part of Blue Coat Systems), was proving inadequate, particularly in terms of reporting and ease of management. “We were clearly outgrowing the capabilities of our Cisco PIX firewalls,” explains Chris Duffy, CIO, Peirce College. “Its management and interface were cumbersome, and its lack of reporting features severely limited insights or visibility into attacks, threats and overall network activity.” In fact, the only way to extract any type of report on network activity was via command prompt. Furthermore, PacketShaper wasn’t effective at blocking undesirable applications or websites. The glaring lack of visibility and control of applications was jeopardizing the college’s ability to protect students and allow open access to information.

PALO ALTO NETWORKS IS HEAD OF THE CLASS

Peirce College began searching for viable solutions. It reviewed Juniper Networks and Palo Alto Networks firewalls. After the comparison it found the PA-Series next-generation firewalls delivered the unparalleled level of visibility into its campus networks, reporting features and granular control of applications it required. “The PA Series has a really nice management interface and impressive drill down abilities – all right out of the box,” relays Duffy. “We also found its interface for reporting intuitive and helpful, and its speed of implementation amazing.”



ORGANIZATION:

Peirce College

INDUSTRY:

Education

CHALLENGE:

User-based visibility and control of applications to meet contemporary threat landscape.

SOLUTION:

Replace outdated firewalls with PA-Series next-generation firewalls for an unparalleled level of visibility and granular control of applications by user.

RESULTS:

- Reduced risk from threats
- Visibility and control of applications
- Creation of enforceable application use and flexible user group policy
- Device consolidation and cost savings

"In my career I've yet to see a major infrastructure piece go in as smoothly as the installation of the PA Series."

Chris Duffy,
CIO,
Peirce College

Working with Palo Alto Networks partner SUN Management, Peirce College upgraded its outdated Cisco PIX Series Firewall and Blue Coat Systems PacketShaper to the PA Series. "It's everything for us -- our firewall, URL filtering and more," says Duffy. "Less than 24 hours after installation we were already logging problem user activity." Now Peirce College's IT team can monitor, at a granular level, applications being used by students, faculty and staff, and limit threats without detracting from the open nature of its network, which is crucial to the school's mission. "If someone goes to an unauthorized site, they are advised of our acceptable use policy and informed that they will be automatically reported for further attempts to access the application," Duffy reports.

PA SERIES TOPS DEAN'S LIST FOR PERFORMANCE

Somewhat to his surprise, Palo Alto Networks has delivered exactly what Duffy sought when he purchased the PA Series. "The longer you're in IT, the more cynical you become," explains Duffy. "Vendors never live up to the delivery part of their promises. So, kudos to Palo Alto Networks for a product that does everything promised. I've never seen my team so excited over a piece of equipment." For the first time, Peirce College can clearly see what users are doing on its campus networks.

The speed and ease of deploying the PA Series also left Duffy impressed. "This was the smoothest install I have ever experienced for a major infrastructure piece. The quality of the people who did the installation was first class. It was a refreshing change!"

With the help of Palo Alto Networks, Peirce College has the granular visibility and control it needs to protect and support the college's goal of allowing unfettered open access to educational networks and information. "The bottom line is we're just very confident in, and comfortable with, Palo Alto Networks," states Duffy.



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