

First-Responder Agency Uses Barracuda to Put Out Digital Fires

To save lives and property, Smith County ESD2 needed a modern network. With Barracuda CloudGen Firewall, they made it happen.



SmithCounty
Emergency Services District 2

Taking stock

Not long ago, Larry Locke was hired as the IT director of Smith County Emergency Services District 2, a group of 20 fire stations and first-responder centers located in rural northeastern Texas. Although the fire district had a good reputation among the 200,000 residents it serves, its IT infrastructure was mostly an ad-hoc mess.

“Back when I was hired, each individual fire station was doing IT on their own,” Locke remembers. “They each had different infrastructures, connectivity issues, access points, and nothing really designed around central business needs.”

Some stations were still using dial-up internet, Locke says. Others had equally unreliable connectivity through satellites and cell phone hotspots, which made it difficult for central authorities to coordinate their efforts.

What the district needed was uniform infrastructure, Locke says. If they were ever going to get to the next level, they needed a unified network, the ability to prioritize critical network traffic, and better visibility into how IT resources were being used. And Locke knew that a traditional hub-and-spoke network architecture, backhauling all traffic through headquarters, was not feasible in his widely distributed district.

Profile

- Headquartered in Whitehouse, Texas
- 22 fire stations serving ~200,000 residents spread across 749 square miles

Challenges

- Disparate, ad hoc IT setups across different stations
- Lack of reliable data connectivity among stations
- No way to prioritize critical traffic over casual employee internet usage

Solution

- Barracuda CloudGen Firewall x 27
- Barracuda Cloud Control

Results

- Fully connected distributed network across fire district
- Traffic prioritization optimized via traffic intelligence and QOS features
- Exceptional customer support

Looking for answers

Locke and his team began researching next-generation firewalls, and “Barracuda popped up as the top contender,” Locke says. The Barracuda CloudGen Firewall’s traffic intelligence, secure VPN, and QOS features stood out for him.

After testing it against SonicWall and Palo Alto Networks, Locke ordered 27 CloudGen Firewalls to secure the District’s 22 stations, two data centers, a mobile command platform, and a portable tower platform.

Deploying all the CloudGen Firewalls took only two days. “We configured the first one, then just cloned the configuration file to the others and sent them out to be installed. It was very simple,” says Locke.

“Now we’re working on getting the QOS features optimized. I love that we can prioritize different types of traffic. I mean, with lives maybe on the line, you don’t want critical communications to be delayed because someone’s playing a game or watching YouTube,” says Locke. “With the CloudGen Firewalls, we can let folks use the internet on their downtime, without endangering communications in a crisis.”

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Barracuda Cloud Control, which provides centralized management of all his CloudGen Firewalls, is also a winner in Locke’s eyes. “With a district as spread out as ours, it’s a huge time-saver to be able to do all our firewall management from a central location.”



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Support that’s truly supportive

Strangely enough, it was a Barracuda mistake that cemented Locke’s positive feelings about the company. “There was a firmware update, and after that one of our stations went offline,” says Locke. “We called Barracuda support, and while we were talking, the rest of our stations went down too. Now, they were on this issue like a pit bull. They stayed on the phone for twenty hours, bringing in product managers and engineers, and everyone was focused on our problem. No one said ‘let us get back to you’ or anything like that.”

It turned out there was a bug in the firmware update. “Barracuda support was dedicated to resolving our issue,” says Locke. “And I’m sure that saved other customers from experiencing the same problem. Frankly, I’m spoiled now. I’m very intolerant of ordinary support from other companies.”

Overall, Locke says he is very happy with Barracuda. And since he’s also got Barracuda Web Application Firewall, Load Balancer, Email Security Gateway, and Backup solutions in full production, we take him at his word.

Learn more about Barracuda CloudGen Firewalls

barracuda.com/products/cloudgenfirewall