

# Coping with crisis: Leading hotel group tackles cyber risk with flexible firewall and backup devices.



There are many things unprecedented about the Covid-19 crisis. From IT perspective, it's been the abrupt transition to home working it forced on organisations — exposing security gaps and stretching tech teams to the limit. But in the north-east of England, one company already had all the tools it needed in place to securely support a newly distributed workforce.

Adam Rylatt is security field engineer at Cairn Group, the Newcastle-headquartered hospitality company that partners with some of the world's biggest hotel brands, including Crowne Plaza, Holiday Inn and Marriott International. However, when he joined nearly five years ago Rylatt found that IT security was at a very nascent stage.

"A lot of our hotels, although they were big in size, had pretty basic IT infrastructure in place. I mean, basic workgroup environments, no replication of data or security on any level," he explains.

That's why Rylatt and his team decided to replicate the IT infrastructure in place at the group's head office across all 30+ hotel sites. The 18-month project involved setting up domain environments, network file shares, VPN access and more.

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Security Field Engineer  
Cairn Group

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## Profile

- Headquartered in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne
- Family-run business with over 30 years' experience
- Thirty-three hotels and over 30 bars and restaurants across the UK

## Challenges

- No network visibility or firewall granularity
- Poor client-to-site connectivity
- Deluged with phishing emails targeting guests
- Deterioration of tape-based backups

## Solutions

- Barracuda CloudGen Firewall F380
- Barracuda Backup 290 and 490 appliances

## Results

- Client-to-site VPN access used by 200+ users daily
- Seamless transition to secure home working during Covid-19 crisis
- Breach-free since firewalls were installed 2+ years ago
- Stopped multiple phishing attacks missed by Office 365
- Hotel managers can block risky internet browsing by staff
- Rapid recovery from data loss and mitigation against ransomware

“But when we did that, we realised that at the end of our network was a Draytek router which didn’t give us any of the functionality we needed in terms of visibility of the network, advanced VPN for remote users and firewall rules,” says Rylatt. “It was so basic we thought ‘we can’t go on with this as our first line of protection.’”

Effective security is essential to a company like Cairn Group. Like many hospitality businesses, its outlets are regularly bombarded with phishing emails. Opportunistic hackers typically try to takeover Office 365 accounts linked to its hotel front desk and “info@” domains to hijack email conversations between guests and frontline staff. The likely end goal is to elicit credit card and personal information from customers, Rylatt explains.

Client-to-site connectivity was also poor, limiting director productivity. “Everything was very messy,” he says.

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## Exactly what we wanted

After reaching out to its IT supplier, Cairn Group was recommended to try Barracuda Networks’ CloudGen Firewall F380 appliances. These feature a range of deployment options (hardware, virtual or cloud), unlimited site-to-site and client-to-site VPN, full visibility into applications and user groups, advanced threat protection (incl. sandboxing) and built-in web security and IDS/IPS.

Installation of a demo product went seamlessly.

“Straightaway feedback was exactly what we wanted,” says Rylatt. “It’s an all-in-one solution where it didn’t matter what we threw at it, it solved everything for us.”

In fact, the roll-out went so well that Cairn Group chose Barracuda Networks to also support its backup requirements. Originally, backup varied from site to site, with a blend of on-site, cloud and in some cases HP tape-based backups that were constantly breaking due to heat and mistreatment. Rylatt explains the team were particularly worried about the integrity of data at the group’s headquarters, where highly sensitive corporate information was stored.

Barracuda Backup 290 and 490 appliances were slotted in with ease across all sites, including the group’s care homes, to provide rapid recovery from data loss and mitigation against ransomware, disasters, and malicious destruction.

“Without having them in place, we’d have sites that I know now would be obliterated in terms of data security,” says Rylatt. “The Barracuda tech support was also amazing. They laid the groundwork for us to configure everything how we wanted, and there were no teething issues.”

## IT to the rescue

Cairn Group has been thrilled with the VPN functionality, improved network visibility and threat protection, as well as the ease-of-management via the Barracuda Firewall Control Center, says Wyatt.

Client-to-site VPN access, which Rylatt brands “a real lifesaver”, has been rolled out on all company devices and used by 200 people across all hotels on a daily basis.

“In hospitality especially, IT is seen almost as a cost centre — certainly not like the sales managers who are actively bringing in business. We’re just sitting in the background trying to make things run with as few headaches as possible,” explains Rylatt. “But with Barracuda even the directors who aren’t tech minded saw the benefits of the products straightaway, which spoke volumes.”

As well as providing peace-of-mind in repelling phishing emails and attempted breaches, the firewalls have also enabled Rylatt and his team to respond to specific requests from hotel general managers about staff internet access, to further reduce the company’s risk exposure.

“With Barracuda Networks we can set-up a group based on Active Directory and create a URL filter; it gives so much control over the security of our network,” explains Rylatt.

“Before this it would have been such a headache to do, we’d probably say that we couldn’t make it work. But the complete control the firewalls have given us and visibility of who’s using what on the networks have been invaluable.”

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## Last line of defence

The hospitality business has been incident free since it put Barracuda Networks in place over two years ago, with the firewalls acting as the “last line of defence on several occasions” where native Office 365 security has failed to stop malicious activity. But even more important in these challenging times, is that Cairn Group’s transition to remote working at the height of the Covid-19 crisis was seamless.

“We’re so thankful it’s in place. Our members of staff, especially in head office, can do the same job at home as sat in the office. That’s been a big win,” says Rylatt. “Everyone knew the product and the way they access it is so intuitive. So, switching over was easy. I’m not dealing with any user queries.”

Going forward, Cairn Group has already had a full demo of Barracuda Essentials, and was “very impressed” with the all-in-one cloud-based email security offering. But that’s a story for another day.

### Learn more about Barracuda CloudGen Firewall and Barracuda Backup

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