Sophos Protects Leading Bank from Advanced Cyber Threats

HNB Finance Limited uses industry-leading protection from Sophos XG Firewall for WAN link load balancing and protection against targeted attacks.

Customer-at-a-Glance

HNB Finance Limited

Industry
Banking and Finance

Number of Users
1,600

Website
http://www.hnbgrameen.lk/

Solutions
Sophos XG Firewall
Sophos Firewall Manager
HNB Finance Limited is an internationally acclaimed brand known for its contribution to the microfinance industry. As of today, HNB Finance Limited is a full-fledged financial service provider in Sri Lanka. With over 300,000 customers, 69 branches, and more than 1,800 employees, securing the company’s network perimeter and ensuring uninterrupted WAN connectivity is right at the top of the company’s IT security to-do list. HNB Finance Limited identified Sophos XG Firewall as the security solution best placed to deliver on its network security and connectivity requirements.

**Business Challenges**

- Preventing frequent WAN link failures causing service interruptions at the branch level
- Optimizing the availability of multiple WAN links
- Implementing Quality of Service (QoS)
- Detecting attacks and setting up antivirus protocols on the external perimeter
- Blocking the latest advanced threats like ransomware, bots, worms, hacks, breaches and APTs

**What were the network security challenges you faced and how did these impact your organization?**

Strengthening corporate security and maintaining business continuity were the two primary challenges faced by HNB Finance Limited. The organization’s business activities are spread across 69 locations and it faced frequent network connectivity failure at the branch level, which severely impacted business functions.

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‘Our vision was to implement redundant, auto load balancing WAN network with improved security and administrative capabilities. Our search for such a solution ended in the XG Firewall offering from Sophos, which delivered on both these critical requirements at a reasonable cost.’

Mr. Pradeepa Dias
Assistant General Manager – Chief Information Officer
HNB Finance Limited
Pradeepa Dias, CIO, HNB Finance Limited, and his team realized that these interruptions lead to customer dissatisfaction and impact the reputation of the organization. The team was therefore eager to rectify these link failures, as the branches did not have redundant WAN connectivity.

"I was also concerned about the available bandwidth courtesy multiple WAN links not being optimally utilized, which was also affecting business processes and organizational productivity," says Pradeepa. "The employees were finding themselves overworked as link downtime played havoc with their work schedule."

The IT team also found it difficult to prioritize network traffic, and unimportant network traffic was often given prominence over critical traffic. The team led by Pradeepa also looked to establish a secure, robust, and efficient communication infrastructure for connecting HNB Finance Limited’s complex and highly distributed ecosystem of employees and customers. They looked to build a network that would be extremely reliable, simple, and offered complete data visibility and security.

Also on the agenda, was strengthening HNB Finance Limited’s IT security posture by imposing the right security policies in a distributed and highly granular manner. Their core concern was maintaining critical data confidentiality at all times.

How and why did you pick Sophos to deliver on your security and network connectivity needs?

“We were searching for an IT security vendor that had a track record of working closely with customers towards product deployment and ensuring its optimal performance,” says Pradeepa. “We also wanted to work with a vendor that had a history of protecting customers’ interests with continuing investment in next-generation technology.”

After thoroughly analyzing their requirements, they zeroed in on implementing a firewall as best placed to take care of their network security and continuity requirements. A subsequent comprehensive evaluation of the firewalls available on the market made it clear that Sophos should be their vendor of choice. It provided industry-leading cybersecurity solutions, backed by SophosLabs, a global network of threat intelligence centers, and the company’s committed towards providing comprehensive security that works as a system and is easy to deploy and manage.

What do you think makes a good firewall?

Pradeepa sees next-generation firewalls as the linchpin of an organization’s attempts to strengthen its cybersecurity infrastructure. At HNB Finance Limited, he and his team wanted a security solution that protected internal resources from cyberattacks that are rising in sophistication and scale. They also needed to be on a constant and consistent ‘update curve’ to keep pace with continuously evolving threats.
“The cornerstone of any good firewall is its simple and easy to understand and manage command and control center. I was very clear we wanted to stay away from a firewall that needlessly complicated policy enforcement and management,” says Pradeepa. “I also believe that excellent reporting capabilities and the ability to provide instant insights is the difference between a good and an excellent firewall.”

How does Sophos XG Firewall perfectly fit the bill?
Sophos XG Firewall takes an innovative approach across all areas of network security, from the way firewalls are managed, to the way they report information, and how they work with other security systems around them. This gives HNB Finance Limited an unprecedented level of simplicity, insight, and advanced threat protection.

Unsurpassed usability insight and control: Sophos’ user identity drives all firewall policies and reports, enabling unprecedented next-gen control over applications, web surfing, bandwidth quotas, and other network resources. There are always some risky users in an organization, and Pradeepa’s team can identify these users based on their recent network behavior through the User Threat Quotient (UTQ).

The IT team also has unprecedented visibility and control over the numerous applications that are used to drive the business processes at HNB Finance Limited. Pradeepa’s team use the customizable policy templates to build their own policies based on employee designation, department, and other parameters. User-based application policies can also be deployed and added to a particular user or group. Another important requirement fulfilled by XG Firewall is bandwidth prioritization for critical applications and users.

Business application policy templates also dramatically simplify the task of protecting common web services and applications such as Microsoft Outlook Anywhere, SharePoint, or Lync. For Pradeepa, this was a huge benefit as this cut down on potential oversights while setting up user policies.

Unified policy management provides a single central screen for managing all user, network, and business application policies in one place, making it super easy for the IT team to create, find, manage, and optimize policies.

XG Firewall also offers template-driven activity control with predefined workplace and compliance policies that cover over 90 predefined website categories. This covers billions of pages maintained by SophosLabs. Pradeepa can also import customer URL lists helping him and his team put in place web filtering as per their needs.

Pradeepa is also very happy with the XG Firewall dashboard, the Network Security Control Center, which is amongst Sophos’ key firewall innovations. The dashboard contains several widgets which provide graphical summaries of traffic in the network, the usage of applications, threats detected, users, and the usage of system resources. At a glance, the IT team gets critical network information and the kind of traffic that moves across the network and its user activities. This information helps the team take decisive action quickly and effectively.

Link Redundancy: Pradeepa uses Sophos’ XG Firewall active-active and active-backup to ensure load balancing to maximize the utilization of capacities across the various links. His team also configures some gateways as backup to help configure gateway failover when an active gateway goes down.

During a link failure incident, Sophos XG Firewall regularly checks the connection’s health with the goal to restore the connection faster when internet service is restored. When the connection is restored and the gateway is up again, the traffic will be rerouted through the active gateway automatically.

Why do you trust Sophos to protect you against today’s threats?
“Sophos has a proven history of protecting customers across the globe with its advanced and growing portfolio of security products. XG Firewall’s ATP coverage is also a huge point in its favor,” says Pradeepa. He also has a very high opinion of Sophos Sandstorm that provides an extra level of security against ransomware and other targeted attacks. Although not a part of his current subscription package, he wants to deploy this technology moving forward.

HNB Finance Limited already renewed their Endpoint licenses last year and they will move to Central upon expiry of this existing license. With this move, they will be able to get the benefit of the Synchronized Security approach and the Security Heartbeat in XG Firewall. Pradeepa and his team believes that it is one of the best innovations to have come out of Sophos and is changing the way enterprise organizations like HNB Finance Limited are looking at IT security.

What has your experience been with the Sophos XG Firewall?
The IT team at HNB Finance Limited is very happy with the XG Firewall’s capabilities when it comes to offering protection against known and unknown cyber threats and that the fact that it can be trusted upon to safeguard the organization’s critical data at all times.
“I and my team are extremely impressed with the XG Firewall’s excellent throughput performance irrespective of the resource intensive features that are turned on, and that this performance does not come at the cost of threat detection,” says Pradeepa. “The throughput levels are such that they can keep up with any IT infrastructure and bandwidth upgrade that the IT team needs to make regularly to keep pace with business growth.”

What are the business results of using Sophos XG Firewall?

HNB Finance Limited’s distributed corporate network infrastructure across 48 branches, 21 service and data centers is secured by 73 XG 105s and 3 XG430s, which are centrally managed by 3 Sophos Firewall Managers. One of the most critical benefits they have experienced so far is excellent WAN network redundancy with zero downtime at branch levels. Despite network connectivity being impacted, Sophos seamlessly manages traffic so that end users across branches do not lose connectivity to core system. What this also means is that employees can complete all tasks on time. This has enabled the bank to save considerable amount of man hours, which has led to a reduction in overhead costs to the company.

HNB Finance Limited is also making optimal use of their bandwidth, as XG Firewall is able to automatically load balance incoming traffic irrespective its type, amount, or application. Furthermore, they can now use QoS to prioritize the use of critical business applications over the WAN network using Sophos. This has improved the productivity across HNB Finance Limited.

The rock-solid cybersecurity delivered by Sophos XG Firewall ensures thorough inspection of all incoming traffic before it enters HNB Finance Limited’s IT infrastructure. The IT team now enjoys the advantage of filtering traffic right up to the application layer.