Accounting and Consulting Giant Relies on Bit9 Parity Suite to Secure and Preserve Corporate Culture

Company uses adaptive application whitelisting to offer employees flexibility without jeopardizing enterprise safety.

Summary

BDO USA, LLP is a national professional services firm that provides assurance, tax, financial advisory and consulting services to publicly traded and privately held companies. BDO USA is a member of U.K.-based BDO International Ltd. BDO International competes with the largest accounting firms, including Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, Ernst & Young, KPMG and Pricewaterhouse Coopers. Domestically, BDO has 40 offices in most major metropolitan areas. The firm's workforce fluctuates throughout the year and reaches upwards of 2,800 employees.

The Challenge

BDO's workers are incredibly mobile—90% of the company's 3,000 endpoints are laptops. At any given time, 50% of users are out of the office visiting clients. They work from remote sites such as customer workspaces or hotels. Because workers are on the road often, BDO has instilled in the corporate culture a sense of flexibility with laptops, allowing users to blend corporate and personal computing on a single machine. For instance, BDO supports the use of instant messenger and other real-time communications tools so that employees can connect with their families. "Our users are away from home for extended periods, so we want to offer them that opportunity to stay in touch with loved ones," says Gary Klaiss, manager of desktop engineering at BDO.

However, BDO started to face serious issues with this "open" approach. "Despite security protocols such as anti-virus software on all laptops and extensive user training, we were still dealing with malware on a regular basis," says Ben Stuart, desktop engineer for the firm. Viruses and other malicious code were seeping through email and Web sites. "We were fending off hundreds of attacks each month," he marvels.

Each time a user had malware issues, they either had to drive several hours to the nearest BDO office to have their laptop re-imaged or they had to mail it back. Either way, downtime ranged from hours to days. "That's an unacceptable situation for our employees and the company as that's time we can't bill for," Klaiss notes.

INDUSTRY
Financial Services

CUSTOMER
BDO USA, LLP

ENVIRONMENT
BDO USA, LLP is a member firm of BDO International, a competitor to the largest accounting firms in the world. The company has 2,800 employees operating 3,000 endpoints. Laptops make up the majority and at any given time 50% of employees are on the road visiting clients.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE
BDO must secure laptops while allowing mobile workers, who are gone for long stretches, access to applications that will keep them connected to their families.

SOLUTION
Bit9 Parity Suite

KEY BENEFITS
- Ensures that only authorized applications and content can be accessed via laptops.
- Helps automatically identify and mitigate risks.
- Enables IT to preserve a flexible, yet safe, corporate culture for mobile workers.
- Provides clear visibility into application inventory and usage patterns.

In addition to actual malware problems, Klaiss and the team worried about the burden that could fall on IT when the company rolled out its planned upgrade to Windows 7. The team wanted to keep the flexibility employees enjoyed, but wanted to lock Windows 7 down to prevent more vulnerabilities. This would mean that every time an employee needed to download a new application, they'd have to call into the help desk for approval. That would have been incredibly taxing for a lean support staff of eight to ten people trying to support all the time zones in which the company operates. BDO needed a solution that would automate the application security environment and lessen the burden on IT, while preserving the corporate culture for mobile workers.

The Solution

BDO deployed Bit9 Parity Suite to proactively protect laptops from malware, data leakage and unauthorized software. The centralized management and monitoring application whitelisting system ensures that only authorized software, sites and devices can be accessed by laptops.

Bit9 Parity works in conjunction with the company's Altiris application distribution system and can automatically discern approved and non-approved activity. IT is instantly alerted to non-approved activity and can either allow it or mitigate the problem. For instance, IT recently realized that certain versions of a popular media management tool were causing security problems. Using Bit9 Parity, the team was able to block the program and notify users that they had to patch it before they could run it again.

End Result

"Since installing Bit9 Parity, we've had zero malware incidents," Klaiss says. He believes this has saved the company a lot in terms of user productivity and IT resources. Tech support members that previously spent anywhere from a half hour to a day fixing or re-imaging machines have been freed to focus on more strategic projects.

One such project: The migration to Windows 7. Thanks to Bit9 Parity, the company can upgrade to Windows 7 without an additional management burden on IT. Bit9 Parity automatically determines if a requested application is safe or not, alleviating piecemeal calls to the help desk. IT can properly secure laptops without exhausting IT and frustrating users. "Bit9 Parity has given us the confidence to move forward with this investment," Klaiss says.

Bit9 Parity also has had an unexpected benefit around licensing. Now IT can easily and instantly run reports on how many instances of each application are in use. This information can be used in numerous ways: to prove license compliance; to shift purchased licenses around for optimal use; to locate and delete out-of-date applications and licenses; and to identify, sanction and support employee-driven applications.

"Before we would have to write a query and wait for machines to report back and even then the information wasn't trustworthy. Now we know which users are running a specific version of an application and how often," Stuart says.

Though BDO still uses anti-virus on laptops, Bit9 Parity has been so comprehensive IT has been able to lessen the frequency of full scans, causing less interference for users. All in all, Klaiss and Stuart say Bit9 Parity has been a great addition to BDO and has enabled them to safely and cost-efficiently continue a corporate culture that focuses on the well-being of mobile workers.

BDO deployed Bit9 Parity Suite to proactively protect laptops from malware, data leakage and unauthorized software. The centralized management and monitoring application whitelisting system ensures that only authorized software, sites and devices can be accessed by laptops.