

Feature

WHY GREEN SECURITY MAKES GOOD BUSINESS SENSE

By Ian Kilpatrick, chairman of VAD Wick Hill Group

Until fairly recently, interest in green issues amongst the end user community was comparatively low, and as a consequence, the subject was not high on the channel agenda. However, that situation is changing dramatically. Factors such as Al Gore's movie 'An Inconvenient Truth', government initiatives and a growing concern amongst the general public about 'carbon footprints' are impacting the computer industry. As a consequence, end users are now seriously looking to the channel to provide them with green products.

Undoubtedly, there are major opportunities for those resellers who can deliver solutions which have genuine green benefits. But 'green computing' is an area increasingly surrounded by hype and the channel must be careful to adopt products which do offer real green advantages. Otherwise, resellers face the risk of damaging their reputation and revenues by selling solutions which are incorrectly touted as being green.

Some end users have strong ideas about what constitutes green computing while others may be a bit more fuzzy on the details. They all, however, are looking for the feel good factor of going green. Most are aware of key issues such as reducing power consumption or disposing properly of old systems. However, in many cases it will be down to the channel to educate the end user as to what is actually 'green' about the products they are offering.

What constitutes 'green'

There's no doubt that the IT industry had been particularly profligate over a whole range of green areas in the past, including power consumption, the use of toxic substances, over-packaging, air conditioning and product life cycle.

When we look at what is green about IT solutions, we need to look at the way companies use IT systems, at the design of IT systems, at their manufacture and at their disposal.

Power consumption is one of the key issues. A huge amount of energy is used in running IT equipment, which has become increasingly power hungry. This can be mainly attributed to:

* centralised data centres, with increasing use of multi-core processors and power hungry blade servers, which require more power to run them and a commensurate increase in air conditioning to cool them

* the shift to distributed computing with more and more computers, monitors, printers, etc. being used

* the move to remote and mobile computing, which is increasing the number of PCs being used.

How one vendor has adopted green issues

Unified threat management (UTM) appliances vendor WatchGuard Technologies provides an example of how one company has taken green issues on board and provided benefits which can be sold on as genuinely green. WatchGuard provides reliable, easy-to-manage security appliances with its Firebox X family of products.

WatchGuard UTMs include firewall, VPN, gateway anti-virus, anti-spyware, IDS/IPS, proactive threat management, spam blocking and URL filtering, as well as management and reporting, in a single appliance.

WatchGuard has made a major commitment to implement green issues throughout the company and in its product design and manufacture. Green factors have come to be viewed by WatchGuard not only as environmentally beneficial, but also as a strategic business requirement. The company adheres to the Design for Environment (DfE) initiative, an American environmental standard, which is equally applicable globally.

WatchGuard carries out its green policies by creating designs that reduce materials usage and waste (including packaging), increase recyclability, lengthen life cycles, and minimise energy consumption in all aspects of distribution and operation. WatchGuard products are also designed to comply with specific environmental directives and legislation.

WatchGuard, by the very nature of its products, is already demonstrating its green credentials. Using one WatchGuard UTM appliance, instead of potentially five or more separate appliances or servers, means users save space in the office and significantly reduce power consumption.

This reduction in the power needed is felt both in the rack and in the air conditioning necessary to cool multiple products. Indeed, in smaller organisations, it can completely remove the necessity for 24x7, year-round air conditioning. A single appliance also means one reporting and management interface, which is typically much more practical than multiple interfaces. This minimises training and centralises all security alerts, potentially removing additional server and monitor requirements.

The concept of the WatchGuard UTM is also fundamentally green because you can add functionality by licence key. Users can buy what they can afford or need on their budget at a particular time. As their needs or budget increase, they can upgrade functionality without having to change their hardware platform.

This ability has allowed some users of early WatchGuard models to get over six years usage from their appliances. Later WatchGuard models are even greener as they can increase performance, as well as functionality, through a licence key. So they provide an even greater opportunity for longevity, alongside energy savings.

The ability to increase performance and function is particularly relevant for companies with less than 200 users, where it is often difficult to predict traffic volumes, usage patterns, or indeed numbers of users, more than a year ahead.

Many growing companies find that they have to replace their existing solutions. Either they need more power or they want to add additional security capabilities to deal with new threats. The WatchGuard Firebox range was designed so that companies can add both greater performance capability and additional security functions through a licence upgradeable key, rather than throwing out their old system and buying another one, thus preventing waste.

In addition, the Firebox firmware coding is designed for optimum performance. It is capable of carrying a considerable additional load effectively, with a structured performance degradation at the limits of performance. This is greatly preferable to 'silo' type UTM solutions, where the additional load can lead to a sudden rapid fall off in performance, then a total loss.

Recycling is another area where WatchGuard has committed itself to green principles. The company has established an attractive pricing structure for recycling its products in the field, which includes buy-back schemes to encourage people to move from less electrically efficient appliances onto more efficient ones. WatchGuard also provide a clear cut recycling structure for products that lie outside WEEE.

Paper product manuals can be a source of waste and require energy and materials to produce. WatchGuard uses paper manuals only when strictly necessary and offers CDs or online help to assist users.

As far as legislation on recycling and the use of toxic substances is concerned, WatchGuard products fully comply with WEEE, the European Community directive on waste electrical and electronic equipment which, together with the RoHS Directive, became European Law in February 2003.

WEEE sets collection, recycling and recovery targets for all types of electrical goods, including computer equipment. The RoHS directive restricts the use of certain substances (lead, mercury, cadmium, hexavalent chromium and two flame retardants - PBB and PBDE) in electrical and electronic products sold in the European Union after July 1, 2006. WatchGuard Technologies' e-Series products are fully compliant as of that date.

Computer equipment purchasers should be aware that there are companies selling RoHS exempt products today as opposed to ROHS compliant. Exempt products, (the exemption was provided to enable a manufacturing transition), while legal, still contain harmful substances.

Conclusion

Green issues are now part of our culture, and the IT industry, after a poor start, has become conscious of the need to adopt these ideas. Some vendors, such as WatchGuard Technologies, have embraced green concepts so that they are integrated into every aspect of business.

The channel now has a significant opportunity to capitalise on this desire to go green. With careful appraisal of the genuine green benefits of the solutions they offer, and a willingness to educate end users, resellers can take advantage of this fundamental shift in the factors end users consider when making their purchasing decisions.

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Ian Kilpatrick and Wick Hill Group

Ian Kilpatrick is chairman of value added distributor Wick Hill Group plc, specialists in secure infrastructure solutions. Established in 1976, the company's portfolio covers security, performance, access, services and management. Wick Hill sources and delivers best-of-breed, easy-to-use solutions through its channel partners, providing customer support, implementation, technical services and authorised training courses. Wick Hill is an international organisation supplying most of the Time Top 1000 companies through its network of accredited resellers.

Kilpatrick has been involved with the Group for more than 30 years. He has an in-depth experience of computing with a strong vision of the future in IT. He looks at computing from a business point-of-view and his approach reflects his philosophy that business benefits and ease-of-use are key factors in IT. He has had numerous articles published in the UK and overseas press, as well as being a regular speaker at IT exhibitions.

About WatchGuard Technologies Inc

Since 1996, WatchGuard Technologies, Inc. has been the technology leader in network security appliances, providing reliable and easy-to-manage security solutions to hundreds of thousands of businesses worldwide. The WatchGuard Firebox® X family of unified threat management (UTM) solutions provides the best combination of strong, reliable, and multi-layered security with the best ease of use in its class. All WatchGuard products are backed by the WatchGuard LiveSecurity® Service, an innovative support, maintenance, and education program. WatchGuard is a privately owned company headquartered in Seattle, Washington, and has offices throughout North America, Europe, Asia Pacific, and La

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For further product information, please contact Wick Hill on 01483 227600, web <http://www.wickhill.com>