



The Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital Ensures Network Health with CounterACT

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Scott Kowal
Senior Network Engineer
CCRI

The Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital was in search of a network access control (NAC) solution to make sure unauthorized laptops and devices were not permitted on the network and to limit guest access. The organization also needed a solution that would ensure corporate devices were meeting endpoint security policies, including up-to-date anti-virus and security vulnerability patches on both Windows and MAC devices.

“We have visitors and consultants coming in and they need to use the Internet but we need to block them from accessing research data or financials,” said Scott Kowal, Senior Network Engineer at The Research Institute. “We have to protect patient and financial data. We also can't have people bringing laptops or other devices into the office and plugging them into the network - that's against organizational policy. We needed a solution that would help us automatically find those devices and stop them from entering the network. After all, if you don't know where and when a device is plugging in, how can you know if it's complying with other policies? Every company I've worked with has this challenge.”

Why ForeScout?

The Research Institute's primary concerns were the ability to restrict guest access while still allowing them the ability to access the resources they need, and the capability to find and block non-corporate personal laptop computers. Kowal and his colleagues saw product demonstrations from leading NAC vendors. They also tested solutions in their network environment for up to a month to ensure their choice of appliance worked with the existing infrastructure and that policy creation would be straightforward without inadvertently causing network disruptions.

ForeScout's CounterACT appliance met the organization's top priorities, and the solution checks devices to ensure anti-virus software is up to date and the patch management service is installed and running on each device. “In addition to restricting guest access and blocking users from connecting their own laptops, CounterACT ensures that if a user logs onto our network with a virus, it doesn't affect the main hospital's network because we're connected,” said Kowal. “CounterACT helps us from negatively affecting the hospital and vice versa through the use of the Intrusion Prevention System (IPS) built within the CounterACT appliance.”

How ForeScout Helped

- » Malicious traffic is contained immediately. “The granularity of the IPS solution that's embedded in CounterACT is terrific,” said Kowal. “The options with which you can restrict traffic are so flexible. We weren't looking for this in a NAC product—it's something over and above the NAC solution. When CounterACT sees non-standard traffic, it takes action. It recently recognized a spyware attack and immediately stopped it in its tracks.”
- » Personal devices cannot get onto the enterprise network and guests are allowed only restricted access in conference rooms. Guests are restricted from accessing the enterprise network if they plug into a port in a conference room, while employees can connect and gain normal corporate access using the same port. In addition, CounterACT recognizes unauthorized devices on the enterprise network such as personal laptops and denies them network access.
- » Corporate policies are enforced and off-limit applications are identified. CounterACT recognizes when unauthorized applications are running, such as Peer-to-Peer (P2P) applications, which are against the organization's technology policy. When one of these applications is identified, Kowal or one of his colleagues are alerted and works with the user to ensure it is removed.
- » Transparent Device Interrogation. “CounterACT is seamless to users—they don't even know their devices are being interrogated because it's non-disruptive,” said Kowal.

The ForeScout Difference

In addition to meeting The Research Institute's priorities of restricting guest access and blocking personal laptop computers brought in from home, according to Kowal, ForeScout also provides an abundance of information the organization could not access as quickly and easily before deploying CounterACT. “In addition to the NAC capabilities CounterACT provides, we also get immediate access to a great deal of information we couldn't get before with all the data it collects,” said Kowal. “Information such as who's logged in through what switch, who was the last person to log into the network on a specific Windows PC, user IP address information and more. This kind of information is very helpful for our helpdesk - they need that data all the time.”

Ease of use also happened to be one of the most impressive factors about CounterACT for The Research Institute. “We appreciate the logical layout of CounterACT and how easy it is to use and implement,” said Kowal. “I appreciate this ease of use and helpdesk employees, who have full access to the console, really like it and find it simple to navigate. When technical people - who usually have strong opinions - don't complain, that's really saying something.”