

Alaska Legislative Affairs Agency Gets in the Act with a Juniper Networks NetScreen Firewall and SSL VPN Solution

**Organization:**

Alaska Legislative Affairs Agency

Industry:

Government

Challenge:

Provide secure and assured networking solution to offices dispersed across a 656,000 square mile area, including some in the most remote regions in the United States

Solution:

Juniper Networks firewall and SSL VPN solution

Benefits:

- Easy to deploy, monitor and update
- Enhanced access from remote sites
- Significantly improved level of security
- Lower cost of operations

“Since installing our new Juniper Networks solution, we’ve seen many of our major networking issues fall to the wayside. We have a system that’s secure, fast, reliable and an excellent value for money.”

Curtis Clothier
IT Manager
Alaska Legislative Affairs Agency

Based in Alaska’s state capital, Juneau, the Alaska Legislative Affairs Agency is responsible for providing networking and IT support to the 500 employees of the Alaska State Legislature. Along with the main office, the Agency services 21 Legislative Information Offices scattered around the state from Barrow in the far north to Nome in the extreme west. With many offices located in extremely remote regions of Alaska, the Agency’s task of linking everyone via a secure and reliable network infrastructure is a formidable one.

In the past, the Legislature relied on the Alaska state government network infrastructure to provide the sort of connectivity its workers needed. Even with other agencies helping to share the costs of the system, the Legislature found itself paying high connection fees for Internet connectivity that was slow and often times problematic. What they needed was a low cost, highly secure alternative that would function efficiently no matter whether the user was connected to the network via a 56K connection in a tiny field office or a DSL connection from Anchorage.

For help in improving and updating their system, the Agency turned to two Alaskan network vendors Anchorage-based Applied Microsystems was selected because of its solid reputation for producing sophisticated Web-based business solutions for its clients. With a highly trained technical support team on hand, Applied Microsystems enables clients like the Legislative Affairs Agency to direct their attention to what really matters: focusing on their employees, not their infrastructure.

The Agency also relied on the expertise of Structured Communications to help improve their communications network. With extensive experience in advanced security and local and wide area networks, Structured Communications specializes in networking solutions for clients whose data must always be secure and available and whose operations cannot be hampered by unplanned or excessive down time.

The Solution

After careful consideration and a thorough review of available firewall and virtual private network (VPN) solutions, the Alaska Legislative Affairs Agency selected a Juniper Networks firewall and secure sockets layer (SSL) VPN solution, ideally suited for secure and reliable connectivity between a main office and any variety of remote locations.

IT manager Curtis Clothier had used Juniper Networks NetScreen products at previous jobs, so the decision to rely on Juniper products again was an easy one to make. As Clothier characterizes it, “The tech guys and I all thought Juniper was a good fit. We felt comfortable with the decision to invest in Juniper based upon our previous experience with the product line.”

The firewall portion of the Agency’s solution consists of Juniper Networks NetScreen-5XT appliances, which offer a fast, safe and reliable VPN tunnel between remote sites and the main Juneau office. Each NetScreen-5XT appliance offers up to 70 Mbps of firewall throughput and up to 20 Mbps of 3DES IPSec VPN performance along with support for up to 2,000 current sessions. Embedded antivirus protection provides an additional layer of application-level protection to help eliminate virus threats from the network. The Agency has also deployed NetScreen-5XT appliances within the Juneau office to protect their backup DSL connection to the Internet in the unlikely event that their main access routes are unavailable.

The SSL VPN device installed in the Juneau office is a Juniper Networks NetScreen-SA 1005, which allows authorized users to access the Legislature’s network and applications from any standard Web browser. The NetScreen-SA 1005 contains sophisticated partner or customer extranet features that enable controlled access to differentiated users and groups, with no infrastructure changes and no software agents.

The Benefits

Since deploying the Juniper Networks firewall and SSL VPN appliances, the Alaska Legislative Affairs Agency has benefited from reduced support costs for the VPN, faster and more reliable connectivity and enhanced network security.

The relative ease of deploying the Juniper Networks appliances has enabled the Agency’s IT team to meet one of their key objectives: to reduce the amount of time and effort required to maintain and administer the system. Central management options built into the firewall and VPN make the Juniper appliances ideal for an IT department like the Legislature Affairs Agency, which does not have the time or resources to fly to remote sites every time the network is upgraded or routine maintenance is performed.

Another key benefit of the switch to a Juniper Networks solution is the Agency’s ability to provide remote sites with rapid, secure and reliable access to all of the tools, applications and functions they would be able to use if they were operating out of the Juneau office. Regardless of where they are connecting from, Legislative employees can now store files on the Juneau-based servers, access the internal email system, log into applications, use online meeting tools and communicate with each other and the general public.

The SSL VPN’s security features also allow the Agency to tailor access rights to the needs of specific user groups so that employees are granted broader, more robust rights than members of the public. Identity-driven access adds a further level of resource security by enabling the IT team to assign roles to users within a group to enable or restrict an individual’s access to specific networks, devices or session attributes. The result is a highly customizable networking solution that can be readily adapted to meet the evolving needs of the people it serves.

Clothier summarizes the impact the Juniper Networks solution has had on the Legislative branch when he says, “Since installing our new Juniper Networks solution, we’ve seen many of our major networking issues fall to the wayside. We have a system that’s secure, fast, reliable and an excellent value for money.”



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