Fusion Networks. Transforming Security for a Hybrid-Work World

Do you know what your users are doing on your network, even when they are away from the office? Are they social networking, or storing data in unauthorised clouds? Are they downloading unsafe apps, or expensive and inefficient copies of safe ones?

Those were among the questions the Classic Group asked itself. They led to a discussion with its long-time WAN provider, Fusion Networks, and ultimately to a highly successful makeover of Classic Group's IT platform.

Classic Group are well-known as award-winning leaders in New Zealand's construction sector, with a 26-year history. Like many businesses, their operations changed dramatically in 2020 when the pandemic meant their centralised, mainly office-based teams were suddenly isolated by compulsory working-from-home. Hybrid work had arrived in a flurry. "Working from home" proved addictive and "the office" would never be the same again – suddenly the workplace included home, planes, and building sites. Sometimes even, exotic overseas cafes.

Classic's predicament was common at the time. Remote user numbers grew suddenly and exponentially. Its legacy VPN struggled with the new demands. Well-intentioned "innovative" users found work-arounds. The security stack was bypassed. No central view existed of how the team were performing, nor where in the Cloud documents were being stored. Nor could the consistency of processes among business units be properly monitored or managed.

"We wanted to improve our security posture, but also use the opportunity to make it easier for remote users to connect to the services they required," said Classic Group CIO Andrew Goodin.

Enter Fusion Networks. Fusion had a seven-year history managing Classic Group's WAN, but this assignment took the relationship to a significantly deeper level of engagement.

Fusion rose to the challenge. Joint briefings and think tanks were held. The initial goal of improving firewall and security services on the legacy VPN morphed into a wider brief to deliver an enhanced single-user experience from any device, anywhere, with real-time visibility across all users.

Fusion's General Manager David Till says his company's primary challenge was to identify the ideal solution and present it to the client in a way that clearly demonstrated the value. Other challenges were to understand in depth what Classic's users were doing and improve their MPLS network (Multi Protocol Label Switching which avoids wasteful and slow round trips for data by using "labels" rather than network addresses.) In line with modern practice, instead of relying on a single firewall, multiple firewalls including public ones would be deployed.

Who

Classic Group

National Construction, Property Development + Technology

classicgroup.nz

Challenges

Data security.

Reactive processes by isolated users.

Increased cost profile from lack of visibility and structure over applications.

Poor user experience.

Loss of policy and compliance.

Benefits

Easy, consistent access to business services.

An exceptional experience for all users.

Scalability and flexibility.

Streamlined dashboard.

Ongoing user education for enhanced security and operation.

Detailed visibility of risk exposure, informing policy and decisions.

Solutions

New Edge Private Cloud

Netskope Next-Gen Secure Web Gateway with Dynamic user coaching.

Netskope Private Access for secure Zero Trust Network Access.

Netskope's Advanced Analytics, Patented CloudXD technology.

netskope   ∞ FUSION

Following an extensive review of available technologies, Fusion identified Netskope as the best solution. David Till describes Netskope as "a specialty product that we could support, would be scalable, would solve the barriers, and enable Classic to move forward confidently." It moved away from WAN solutions towards Netskope's application-rich, cloud-delivered security platform – described as a Next Generation Secure Web Gateway or NG-SWG.

NG-SWG provides a fast, secure onramp to the closest NewEdge data plane, meaning that protection starts at every access point. Apps can be whitelisted or blacklisted, and tracked to avoid wasteful duplication. For users this means completely secure access to every application, easy access to corporate data, and granular, real-time visibility across all devices and activity.

Fusion is far from alone in embracing Netskope. John Thompson, Chairman of Microsoft and former CEO of Symantec, describes Netskope as "a company that I admire immensely – that had a vision of what they wanted to deliver to customers that was fundamentally different – the Netskope culture is all about being embracing – all about having customers and partners as part of a broader ecosystem." And more than a quarter of the Fortune 100 companies trust Netskope to shield them from evolving threats, new risks, and technology changes.

Visibility is everything. Netskope is not "Big Brotherish" but it does track every user's history, making sure that data storage accords with policy without duplication. For the IT team the continuous feed of enriched information about users' online behaviour allows them to identify user pain points, remove risk, and coach users dynamically. It also provides alert messages if a user attempts to send documents through personal or unauthorised cloud storage apps.

As Classic Group's Andrew Goodin says, "it's an easier experience for our staff – safe without additional barriers. The behavioural patterns we can now identify provide added operational information and help everyone make better decisions."

David Till credits the initial briefing and think tank as being the key to success. "We nailed the customer's mandate - identified their requirements, researched and selected the best product, and worked towards a great outcome. Full commitment and attention by both Classic and Fusion at crucial stages resulted in a system that is robust, functional, user friendly and future-proof."

Nine months on, Classic Group's costs have been reduced through elimination of overlapping licenses and redundant tasks. Best of all, Classic's staff enjoy an exceptional digital experience every day – safe to browse and using the digital tools they need.

To quote Andrew Goodin once more: "It was a bold change to shift to an entirely new platform, with an element of risk. But Classic have faith in our tech support. We looked at the quality of the Netskope and Fusion team – we had a considerable amount of trust and haven't been let down."