

# Network defenses that bring cyber criminals to their knees

- **Business needs** - The company needed to thwart increasingly sophisticated cyber threats and support steady growth through a better communications system.
- **Networking solution** - AT&T Managed Threat Detection and Response defends the company's networks. AT&T Office@Hand delivers communications services that support employees wherever they work.
- **Business value** - Enhanced security, flexibility, and productivity
- **Industry focus** - Mortgage bank
- **Size** - 100+ branch offices; annual loan volume of \$4.9 billion; 1,100 Employees

## About DAS Acquisition Company, LLC

DAS Acquisition Company, LLC, which does business as USA Mortgage, is a residential mortgage company that was created in 2001 to service the St. Louis region as a mortgage bank. It was created by Douglas A. Schukar to help match borrowers with the best mortgage lender. Schukar had a vision of a better way to offer mortgage services. As a result of his methods and ideals, his bank is now "The Home of Possibility" for thousands of homeowners.

## The situation

The company's straightforward policies and friendly customer service led to rapid growth. Because of its growth, the company needed to address its cybersecurity and communications solutions. Its information technology officials needed to boost cyber defenses against new and more sophisticated network threats. And they had to expand communications services needed by new branch offices and remote workers.

## Solution

AT&T Managed Threat Detection and Response protects DAS Acquisition's network with 24/7 security monitoring. AT&T Office@Hand provides voice, fax, text messaging, and audio and video conferencing for DAS headquarters, branch offices, and employees' virtual workspaces.

## A commitment to providing the best customer experience

DAS Acquisition, known to its customers as USA Mortgage, is a full-service institution with a diverse portfolio of loan products that helps it to offer the best choice for each customer. The company has strong strategic relationships within the industry, enabling it to accommodate almost any financial situation. USA Mortgage's level of integrity has led to its receiving continued referrals from others in the industry.

The company has been named one of America's Top Workplaces for 2022, earning special recognition for the work-life balance its employees enjoy. The award is based entirely on feedback from an employee engagement survey completed by the staff.

In 2017, founder and owner Douglas A. Schukar created an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP); he sold his company to his 541 employees for \$1 each. Schukar continues as the company's Chairman and CEO. "We became a 100% ESOP," Schukar said.

"Since then we've grown to over 1,100 employees," said Matt Dearth, DAS Acquisition Vice President of Information Technology. "We saturated the St. Louis area, then expanded to nearly all 50 states."

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Vice President, IT Services,  
DAS Acquisition Company, LLC

The company's employee-owners have a personal stake in providing each customer with the best possible experience, which energizes and empowers them to improve the mortgage process for customers.

## Building the infrastructure from scratch

Dearth joined DAS Acquisition in 2008 when there were only 175 employees. "I was the only person on the IT staff," he said. "I was hired to basically do everything—run the help desk, install computers, and configure all systems."

The company's commitment to its customers and staff has propelled steady growth. DAS Acquisition now has 250 employees working in its St. Louis headquarters, and hundreds more working from over 100 branch offices across the U.S., as well as many employees working remotely from home.

“Growing a company from 175 to 1,100 employees means that I’ve had to build the entire IT infrastructure from scratch and continue to evolve it as needed,” Dearth said. While he is no longer the only IT specialist, defending the company’s networks keeps the team’s hands full.

“Keeping up with IT security has definitely been the biggest challenge,” Dearth said. “My team and I feel the weight of protecting the personal data of hundreds of thousands of our customers, and keeping the jobs of our employees secure.”

## Protection for a growing company

Dearth trusts his team, but takes a personal responsibility in creating the safest possible network environment. “As hardware and technology

become dated, we’re constantly looking for the next generation of solutions,” he said. “Luckily, I’ve been able to build a great IT team over the years that I can trust to keep us secure and productive.”

Technology has changed significantly over the years. “We started with a flat network, very simple firewall rules, and a simple antivirus software,” Dearth said. “Today we have a multi-layered security stack that monitors all traffic and even behavior across every network and in every endpoint device.”

To deal with strong and steady growth, increasing numbers of remote workers, and burgeoning security threats, DAS Acquisition needed a security expert to help protect the expanding company, its employees, and its customers.

“AT&T MTDR has dramatically changed the way we investigate IT security since we can now see everything in one location. It’s invaluable when you have a system that collects all logs from every endpoint, network device, and firewall, and we can see it all in one place.”

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## Defending against advanced threats

The company did not have to look far to find a vendor with deep expertise in threat intelligence and network security. DAS Acquisition has long trusted AT&T Business when it comes to protecting its assets. “AT&T Business stays on the cutting edge—and often invents the cutting edge—of network technology,” Dearth said. “It’s brilliant to have a vendor whose new services parallel the latest technology and security trends.”

He trusts his account representative to keep him and his team apprised of new ways to protect the company. “The account reviews are highly beneficial,” Dearth said. “Our account rep brings in IT experts from AT&T Business who help evaluate our current environment and provide solutions, sometimes for problems we were unaware of.”

Dearth approached AT&T Business when he wanted to improve DAS Acquisition’s defense against advanced threats. The recommendation was for AT&T Managed Threat Detection and Response (MTDR), which protects with 24/7 security monitoring from the experts at AT&T Cybersecurity, powered by the award-winning Unified Security Management platform and AT&T Alien Labs™ threat intelligence.

“We knew we needed syslog monitoring, but we didn’t know which solution would match exactly what we needed,” Dearth said. “After carefully considering many options, AT&T MTDR proved to be the best solution to fit our needs.”

## Advanced protection, concierge service

The solution gives Dearth confidence that his systems are protected. “We are a big target. Some of the security professionals we work with are blown away by how many socially engineered attempts are sent to us daily to try and circumvent our systems,” he said.

“AT&T MTDR was a nice balance that we couldn’t find anywhere else. We get concierge-level service, and we also can investigate our own data.”

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“AT&T MTDR was a nice balance that we couldn’t find anywhere else. We get concierge-level service, and we also can investigate our own data,” Dearth continued. “I’ve got some brainiacs that work for me that were unhappy about other vendors’ solutions. Why? Other solutions didn’t allow our team to investigate our own data. We want to see what’s going on for ourselves, but also have that level of concierge service to assist or do on our behalf, as needed. AT&T MTDR has that perfect balance.”

## An added layer of security

Deployment was a complicated process since AT&T MTDR connects with so many of DAS Acquisition's systems. "It's a very custom solution," Dearth said. "AT&T Business did a great job of implementing it for us. We still have a biweekly follow up meeting to review implementation and findings with our MTDR team. Once trained by the MTDR engineers, we found the system easy to use. We're thankful for their willingness to work with us."

The solution provides a new way to look at the company's networks and devices. "AT&T MTDR has dramatically changed the way we investigate IT security since we can now see everything in one location," Dearth said. "It's invaluable when you have a system like MTDR that collects all logs from every endpoint, network device, and firewall, and we can see it all in one place."

AT&T MTDR has been extremely helpful as the company has grown and as additional staff began working remotely when the pandemic unfolded. "It was a great solution for our expansion, being that it connects to every device whether they're at home or in a branch or here in corporate," Dearth said. "It's an added layer to our security stack that definitely improves our threat defense."

## More effective collaboration

When DAS Acquisition decided to unify its telephony platform, it chose AT&T Office@Hand. The cloud-based solution is geo-redundant and provides voice, fax, text messaging, and audio and video conferencing that

connect DAS headquarters, branch offices, and even employees' virtual offices.

The highly secure IP business communication service allows employees to work virtually anywhere, on almost any device, and collaborate more effectively. "The mobile app, eFax, automated attendant, and single sign-on are essential features that fit our needs," Dearth said. "It's been a very reliable system."

DAS considered another vendor's offer but found the offer from AT&T Business more advantageous. "AT&T was the most willing to work with us and accommodate our needs for specific features, and help with our hardware rollout," Dearth said. The company's representative from AT&T Business helped Dearth's team to customize the solution. "The other vendor wasn't willing to budge when we needed a couple additional features from the higher-level package," he said.

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## Substantially better security and communication

Dearth credits AT&T Business with assisting DAS Acquisition to enhance security and improve flexibility and communication. “With the new ability to identify malicious intent, our security is substantially better, thanks to MTDR,” he said. “And communication is the best we’ve ever had, thanks to Office@Hand.”

Equally important are the ongoing evaluations that AT&T Business conducts for DAS Acquisition. “When AT&T brings IT experts to discuss our business technology practices, they ask questions we may not have known to ask ourselves,” Dearth said.

And if the experts from AT&T Business identify a gap, “AT&T usually has a solution to put in place,” Dearth said. “Our account representative is the best; she’s helped out more than I can express.”

The solutions will support the company’s expansion plans. “Continued growth is inevitable with our momentum,” Dearth concluded. “We chose these AT&T Business products because they fit our needs and support limitless growth.”