So Many Threats, So Little Time

Despite a small budget and staff, the Brevard County Tax Collector protects an enormous amount of financial data with the help of AT&T security services.

Brevard County, Fla., stretches approximately 72 miles along the state's eastern coast, from Titusville in the north to Melbourne and Palm Bay in the south. The size of the county means government offices within it serve many customers and manage a large number of transactions.

Despite the county's size, the Brevard County Tax Collector's office relies on just four IT personnel to see to it that citizen tax data is protected. The office is responsible not only for the network within its headquarters, but also for networks in six satellite offices located throughout the county.

Over the last few years, Rhonda Thomas, Chief Information Officer for the Brevard County Tax Collector, has grown increasingly concerned about cybersecurity.

"As a government tax agency, we tend to be a target for cybersecurity threats," says Thomas. "We have a fiduciary responsibility to the public, so we need to make sure we are protecting our data."

Thomas wanted to improve her office's ability to monitor its networks and manage cybersecurity risks. But without the ability to grow its IT headcount, the county needed help.

"When you have a small staff, you have to find technologies and services that can augment what you're able to do," says Thomas. "We didn't have a group of 10 network analysts and programmers to develop a solution in house."

Brevard County has been engaged with AT&T for a long time, so it was natural for the Tax Collector's office to turn to AT&T for assistance. After examining the office's needs and requirements, AT&T implemented its Vulnerability Scanning Service, Security on-Demand and Threat Manager – Log Analysis.

A 24-hour security guard

Managed security services from AT&T greatly reduced the amount of time and effort Brevard County Tax Collectors' IT staff spend on protection and monitoring. Today, as the office collects data logs, they are automatically run through AT&T security analyzers, which highlight any suspicious activity. Anything abnormal is isolated and vetted by AT&T's Threat Manager – Log Analysis to determine whether it warrants a closer look.

Thomas says going through all that data internally would take her staff weeks.

"We'd need many more people than we currently employ just to be able to keep up with looking at network logs, firewalls, routers, servers, etc.," says Thomas. "And by the time we could even collect all of that data, it would be too late. AT&T helps compile all of it and informs us of anything suspicious. We are able to draw on their existing knowledge and analytical skills. Ultimately, it gives me access to a whole slew of IT security people that help me do my job."

Meanwhile, AT&T's Vulnerability Scanning Service helps the county conduct vulnerability assessment and management.

"Nearly everything we use today has an internet connection, whether it's a printer, a fax machine or scanners," says Thomas. "Now every time we put something on the network we can determine if that product is secure enough. If it's not, we are alerted and receive suggestions on actions we can take to better protect ourselves."

For example, if a piece of software needs an update or printer software contains a security vulnerability, the system identifies those issues and provides Brevard County Tax Collector IT personnel details on how to correct it, including vendor information and, in some cases, a phone number to call.

The network visibility AT&T's solution provides has proven invaluable to the Brevard County Tax Collector. For example, if someone attaches a new product to the network, Thomas and her staff are alerted. They can then track where the new product came from and determine whether it's legitimate or not.

The AT&T security system also gets more intelligent as the county uses it.

"The more data AT&T collects, the more they're able to determine what's normal for us," says Thomas. "The abnormal stuff is highlighted more quickly because AT&T builds a track record of our network behavior."

Making the most of limited resources
Collaborating on security with AT&T also enables the Brevard County Tax Collector's office to make the most of its limited resources.

"The ability to monitor and respond to security threats 24x7x365 is a complex and time-consuming task that a lot of customers cannot provide themselves," says AT&T Strategic Account Lead Thomas Gill. "This was about figuring out how to offer the best value to the Tax Collector for the limited budget and staff they have."

For Thomas, AT&T's security solution was a more viable proposition than hiring new IT security personnel.

"Hiring a good security analyst today is a very expensive proposition, especially for a small agency," says Thomas. "IT security people are in huge demand right now, so

they are difficult to find. Then, you have to deal with training and turnover. When you start adding that all in, the product basically ends up paying for itself."

With AT&T's managed security solution, Thomas now has the strength of an entire analytical staff behind her. The county also meets with a dedicated AT&T security analyst monthly to review any needs, changes or important considerations.

"He lets us know how we're doing and discusses anything they see that we need to address," says Thomas. "They help pinpoint where we need to focus our attention so I can better utilize my own resources."

Ultimately, the AT&T solution provides security services that are managed around the clock, allowing Brevard County Tax Collector IT staff to focus on other critical operational duties.

AT&T's security solutions will also enable Brevard County to better prepare as the security landscape evolves. As new cybersecurity threats emerge, the county is alerted and can take proactive steps.

"It's a big help to have somebody in your corner that's able to provide that type of critical information," says Thomas.

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>
> – Rhonda Thomas, CIO, Brevard County Tax Collector

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