

The Organization

Ascend One Corporation
8930 Stanford Boulevard
Columbia, MD 21045
www.ascendone.com

The Challenge

Establish an easy-to-deploy, easy-to-use secure virtual support center.

The SonicWALL Solution

SonicWALL® Aventail® E-Class EX-1600 SSL VPN

The Results

- Easy-to-use and easy-to-deploy secure remote access
- Broader staffing base and more flexible shift coverage
- Reduced costs in equipment, shipping, travel, and support
- Increased productivity, job satisfaction, and staff retention
- Faster time-to-resolution from third-party equipment vendors

The Challenge: Secure a Virtual Financial Services Call Center

Consumer debt has skyrocketed to \$2.2 trillion, and the average American household debt is estimated at more than \$12,000. Ascend One Corporation and its family of businesses provide financial education and solutions to assist consumers in eliminating debt. Previously, Ascend One’s team of customer solutions and service agents worked out of a call center based out of its Columbia, Maryland, headquarters. Recently, Ascend One recognized the potential competitive advantages it could obtain by shifting to a virtual call center model in which agents could work from anywhere.

To support this call center, Ascend One needed to establish a secure virtual private network (VPN) that was easy to deploy and support for IT, as well as easy to use for the call center agents.

“Initially, we deployed an IPSec VPN,” said Hyun Soo Park, senior director of information technology. “But soon found that to be finicky and difficult to deploy.” The IPSec VPN required hands-on installation and configuration of a “fat” client on each remote computer. “First, we’d have to purchase, load, configure and test the VPN software on the computer and then get it to the remote agent. Once the agent got it at home, depending on their ISP, we would still run into issues with the connectivity back to our network. Every deployment was a one-off installation. It was very time consuming to troubleshoot.”

While the IT team supports 350 agents and a total of 450 employees company-wide, at any given time Park only has two available PC technicians. “They’re already busy all the time just answering normal help desk tickets,” said Park.

The Solution: SonicWALL® Aventail® SSL VPN

In order to connect agents without exhausting limited IT resources, Park implemented a SonicWALL® Aventail® E-Class EX-1600 SSL VPN solution. SonicWALL Aventail SSL VPNs eliminate the need to install “fat” IPSec clients at remote endpoints, while still delivering granularly secure access to resources.

“We evaluated multiple vendors,” said Park. “SonicWALL was the most intuitive. My technicians were able to deploy and use the solution after walking through the interface with the installation engineer. It was up and running in just a couple hours. Ease of deployment was a very important factor in our decision.”

The agents require access to custom Web-enabled CRM, accounting, telephony, monitoring and office applications. But since IT cannot directly manage the agent’s computers, Park must assume they are untrusted. So instead of installing and managing applications on untrusted computers, Park now uses the SonicWALL Aventail SSL VPN to deliver secure remote access to Web-enabled applications on virtual desktops that are load-balanced among multiple terminal servers.

Ascend One

"We evaluated multiple vendors. SonicWALL was the most intuitive. My technicians were able to deploy and use the solution after walking through the interface with the installation engineer. It was up and running in just a couple hours. Ease of deployment was a very important factor in our decision."

—Hyun Soo Park
Senior Director of
Information Technology
Ascend One Corporation

SonicWALL Benefits

- Eliminates need for "fat" client installations
- Allows granular control over access to resources
- Delivers Web-based access to Windows Terminal Services applications
- Seamlessly integrates with two-factor authentication

The SonicWALL Aventail SSL VPN provides the granular access control needed to restrict authorized access only to the virtual desktop applications on the terminal servers, and not the entire corporate network. And since the SonicWALL Aventail SSL VPN supports RSA cryptography, Park was also able to seamlessly integrate the same two-factor authentication engine previously used with the original IPSec VPN solution, without investing in any additional hardware or software.

The Results: Easy-To-Deploy, Easy-To-Use VPN

"Everyone loves the new process," said Park. "It's much easier. Previously, new agents would be held up from starting their jobs for a couple of days while IT worked out configuration and log-in issues. With SonicWALL, we just point them to a URL and they're up and running on day one. They just enter their user name and pass code and they're in a customized Web portal with links to all their authorized resources."

One major competitive advantage Ascend One has realized is the virtualization of its workforce. "We can hire from anywhere and not have to incur the costs of trying to buy a computer, ship it to the agent, have them set it up and install the computer, or send a technician out there to install the computer," said Park. "Today, we have call center agents working across the nation. We can cover shifts more flexibly. Employee productivity and satisfaction is up. Job retention is higher."

The Future: Secure Remote Access for the Enterprise

By using the SonicWALL SSL VPN in conjunction with existing firewall and intrusion detection systems, Park can provide virtual call center agents with a tunnel into the corporate network without compromising any security or overextending IT resources. So far, Park's team has migrated half of the Ascend One agents onto the virtual call center, and plans to move the rest.

Additionally, Ascend One has a significant inventory of third-party technology, and many of their vendors support this equipment directly. "The SonicWALL Aventail SSL VPN let us allow our vendors into our network, but only to the specific servers they need to access," said Park. "That has really helped us work with vendors to isolate and troubleshoot problems quicker."

But Park isn't stopping there. "Our direction is to move everyone corporate-wide to SonicWALL Aventail SSL VPN—IT, HR, marketing, and management. Once we saw that we get all the security of granular access control, plus the benefits of being easy to deploy and use, it's a no-brainer. I can't see any downside."

SonicWALL, Inc.

1143 Borregas Avenue
Sunnyvale CA 94089-1306

T +1 408.745.9600
F +1 408.745.9300

www.sonicwall.com

