

Healthcare, Network Security Should Be A Combo Pitch

Don't forget the security demands tied to the electronic health record (EHR) movement spurred by compliance and the federal government.

BY GENNIFER BIGGS

Despite so much attention around the federal funding for the adoption of EHRs, the channel hasn't talked much about the security needs of the healthcare industry as it goes digital. However, solutions providers interested in building a strong focus in the healthcare vertical must be ready to bundle security around any EHR solutions.

While many healthcare entities have built IT infrastructure with security in mind over the years, it has mainly been with perimeter security in mind versus the data loss prevention and privacy security measures mandated today. "As health information exchanges [HIEs], virtualization, cloud computing, end user devices, and mobile app proliferation have become a reality in the healthcare workplace, so has the need to rethink the security infrastructure and overall architecture," explains Mark Hanson, director of healthcare at Fortinet. "We are at a tipping point with EHRs and the financial incentives to migrate from paper to digital, so the opportunity to offer integrated security solutions is definitely peaking."

EHRs are not the only driver around security adoptions in the healthcare vertical; compliance continues to drive the need for segmentation, auditing, and control of data within networks, and modern technology such as social media communications, wireless networking, and mobility are also driving security. Bob Darabant, VP of

the Americas for Astaro, a Sophos company, adds that another trend that requires healthcare organizations to rethink security is telehealth — the ability to treat patients remotely. "Rural areas are seeing fewer doctors practicing in their area for a variety of reasons. However, the need for doctors is not diminished, so hospitals and clinics are looking for ways to connect doctors in urban locations to rural facilities," he explains. "Connectivity and security are essential parts of any telehealth plan and should be included in the solutions a VAR offers to healthcare customers."

Deliver Security Message As Part Of Overall EHR Value Proposition

With all those moving parts having an impact on healthcare customers' environments, are VARs already focusing on the security opportunity in this vertical? Yes and no, says Darabant. "VARs recognize the need for security with EHR, so it isn't that they are overlooking security. A more accurate statement may be that they don't know how to approach the topic and don't want to scare healthcare providers away from EHR by bringing up security concerns," he says. He adds that the problem stems from VARs being uncomfortable or uneducated about discussing security.

For example, VARs should strive to explain that while EHR is, in reality, more secure than paper-based files, security must still be a consideration to completely protect those confidential files from prying eyes. "Once a VAR understands these issues better they can bring up security as a positive and take advantage of the revenue opportunity it presents," says David Harley, senior research fellow at ESET North America. He adds that most healthcare customers want to offload as much of their IT complexity as possible, especially since they may not understand all the compliance issues that tie in to any security solution in their vertical. That can present a problem for VARs that may have strong knowledge around EHR, but less specialization in security.



MARK HANSON,
DIRECTOR OF
HEALTHCARE



BOB DARABANT,
VP OF THE AMERICAS



DAVID HARLEY,
SENIOR RESEARCH
FELLOW



Hanson feels that is where the opportunity to extend EHR relationships into more complex security partnerships hits a wall. "The VARs that are engaged in or associated with an EHR deployment are very different partners from those engaged in traditional IT," explains Hanson. "That means security is often overlooked in the EHR implementation process. Security should be part of the initial EHR design, but I've found it can be a challenge for many of those VARs to sell security when they are not as experienced with those solutions."

**VARs Must Consider
Where To Insert Security In EHR**

Another reason security may slide through the cracks when VARs are selling into the healthcare vertical may be that many EHR solutions are not designed with security in mind. "The opportunity for the channel is in providing the secure shell around these security-soft applications," explains Hanson. "Few of these applica-

tions meet regulatory mandates, much less the security and compliance required by customers." He recommends VARs create a basic security shell that consists of verifying the security of the EHR system itself; scanning the EHR systems by a third-party vulnerability scanner; segmenting the EHR systems into a network that is tightly controlled and audited with firewall, application control, and IPS to ensure security; and implementing two-factor authentication and secure VPN access to the EHR systems. From there, VARs will need to discuss the individual needs and concerns of each customer; for instance, a small doctor's office will face markedly different security threats than a large hospital.

Harley adds that those conversations are the perfect opportunity to really dig deep with a customer to learn about unique security needs, especially since healthcare-related security threats are so often tied to personnel rather than outside threats. "The pain points in this vertical are as much to do with personnel management as

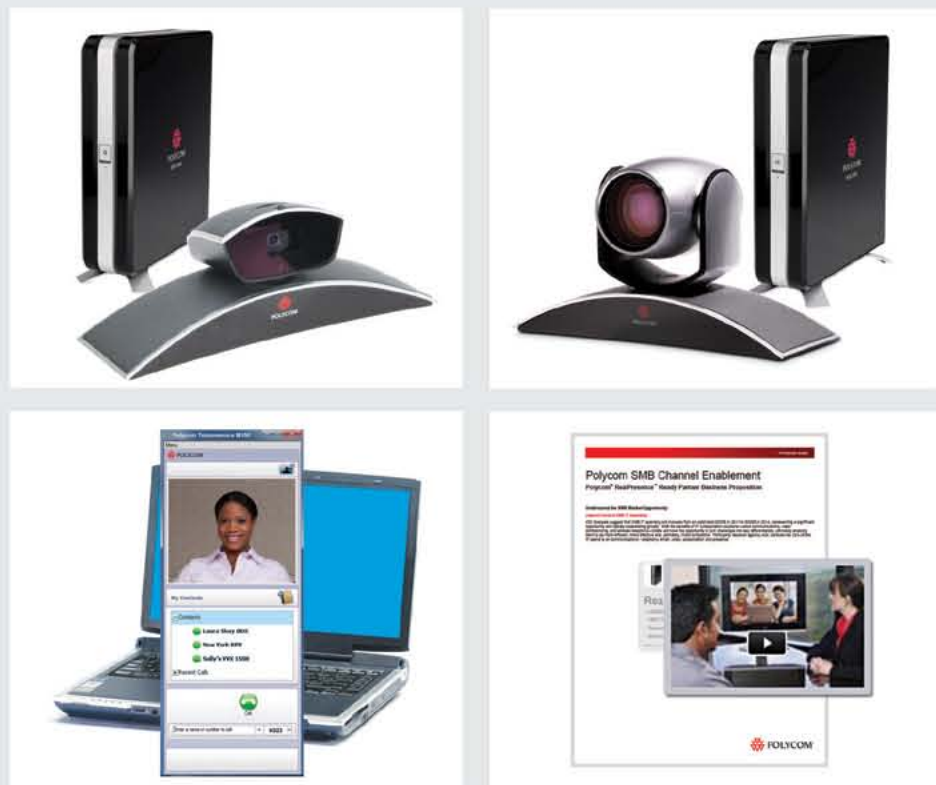
technical security," he explains. "Security in healthcare is primarily about privacy and therefore about databases — and access to those databases — containing sensitive information, encryption, and so on."

To start that conversation is simple, says Darabant. "Explaining the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health [HITECH] Act is a great place to start. Then the VAR can bring up that security is a necessary component of EHR if they want to comply with HIPAA [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act] regulations," he explains. He suggested learning as much as possible about the HITECH Act so the conversation feels consultative rather than sales-oriented. Once the conversation kicks off, VARs should be prepared for a handful of common objections. "It is the usual story of security vs. ease of use," explains Hanson. "Security should take precedence over availability when considering the consequence a healthcare organization faces with compliance laws."

Darabant reiterates that security is often a concern that channel partners face. "VARs need to be able to explain that, in some ways, securing electronic records is easier and more effective than securing paper records. We've all heard stories of major medical facilities losing patient information because someone left a briefcase full of patient files on a train. If all the records are electronic and encrypted, leaving a laptop in a public area will minimize the risk of someone gaining access to sensitive and private information." The best way to battle this objection, the vendors say, is to educate yourself on traditional security risks and then compare and contrast with the risk of a digitized environment. (Hint, hint. Tap your vendor partners for help with these anecdotes and statistics.)

Overall, the vendors agree that the move toward EHR is happening, slowly but surely, and VARs must see the entire opportunity tied to that evolution — from digitizing records to workflow, storage to security. ●

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