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Security firm takes leap into virtualization

San Antonio Business Journal - by Mike W. Thomas

A new wave of “green” computing technology is helping government agencies and private companies save money. But with every technology advancement comes new vulnerabilities for security breaches.

CNF Technologies, a 3-year-old tech security firm, is looking to fill those gaps for both its public and private-sector clients.

The firm is currently focused on finding vulnerabilities in a new technological leap forward known as virtualization.

Virtualization refers to a process by which multiple computers can be set up on a single server, thus allowing them to perform tasks without taking up additional space or using additional power.

“These virtual computers are part of a green wave meant to reduce power consumption,” says Andy Pilato, director of engineering for CNF Technologies. “Instead of having 12 different systems running at the same time, you might have one large system with 12 different computers running on one machine. That way you reduce money, heat and power usage.”

Fred Ramirez, founder and CEO of CNF Technologies, says virtualization is an effort to take advantage of the fact that most servers sit idle 60 percent of the time while still taking up space, using power and releasing heat. New software now allows that idle time to be put to use hosting several “virtual” computers that can operate separately and perform multiple tasks on the same server.

“We think this is a technology that is going to catch on,” Ramirez says. “But with every new advancement you open the door to new vulnerabilities.”

Pilato says CNF Technologies is jumping into this space as an integrator in the hopes of taking it to the next level before other bigger players get into the act. They will help clients who want to take advantage of virtualization to set up their network and secure it using products currently available from VM-Ware and **Microsoft Corp.**

Rapid growth

Founded in 2005 as Cyber Net Force, CNF Technologies has grown from making \$150,000 in its first year, to surpassing \$1 million in revenues this year with expectations to double that amount in 2009.

“We are looking to change our business model slightly by focusing more on the corporate side,” Ramirez says. “So far we have had a lot of short-term engagements and we are looking for more long-term relationships with our clients.”

Currently, CNF Technology’s biggest contract is with the U.S. Air Force to provide network security for onboard computers during flight operations. Laptops sitting on planes are especially vulnerable to security breaches and CNF Technologies specializes in providing security under those circumstances.



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Fred Ramirez, founder of CNF Technologies, helped to pioneer many of the core network security applications in use today.

The company has learned to integrate different computer applications onto a single appliance so as to use as little space as possible on board the airplanes. These include intruder-detection systems, firewall applications, network scanning and anti-virus software.

Ramirez says the company is looking to expand their services to the commercial sector with new applications that target large companies that must do a lot of traveling and transporting of data.

Security pioneer

Ramirez is an Air Force veteran who got his start helping the military develop security systems for its computer networks. He was tapped to be the first director of the Air Force Computer Emergency Response Team (AFCERT) in the 1990s.

Ramirez was at the helm of AFCERT during the development of many of the basic tools of the computer security industry, including one of the first virus protection programs and the first enterprise intrusion detection system. He oversaw the growth of AFCERT as it expanded from three employees in 1990 to more than 80 when he left in 1997.

Lee Sutterfield, founder and CEO of **SecureLogix Corp.**, helped set up AFCERT in the late 1980s and recruited Ramirez to be its director. He says he is not surprised to see Ramirez running his own successful security company today.

“He was a member of a very small community that has had a much larger influence on network security than many people realize,” Sutterfield says. “Fred was one of the key five or six players who helped to pioneer the whole way we do network security for large organizations today. I think he is a great success story.”

Ramirez says in recent years that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have diverted a lot of the funding that would have been used to research the kind of security applications that they provide.

The fact that his company is small with little overhead allows it to stay competitive in this environment, he adds.

“Five years from now we hope to have a nice-sized company that we can call home which will allow us to do things that are both exciting and challenging,” he says.

CNF Technologies Inc.

Founded: 2005

Owner: Fred Ramirez

Employees: 12

Annual revenues: \$1 million

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