The Portland Trail Blazers score a slam dunk for user security
The Portland Trail Blazers are an American NBA basketball team based in Portland, Oregon. As a popular NBA team, the Trail Blazers are highly visible both in their home state and around the United States, and this notoriety could make them a target for an attack. In order to protect their infrastructure, the Trail Blazers embarked on an organization-wide initiative to tighten security.

The organization often has staff working remotely who require access to IT systems via a Virtual Private Network (VPN). With data breaches occurring with increasing regularity, the Trail Blazers wanted to proactively secure their infrastructure by validating that users are who they say they are.

Keeping it simple
The Trail Blazers wanted to start by tightening up access from outside the networked environment. Many users are able to access the organization’s systems when they are working from home, travelling, or in an area of the team’s campus where no network access is available. The team quickly came to the conclusion that Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) was the simplest and most effective mechanism for reducing the risk of the human factor. Working with partner, Right! Systems, the organization selected SMS PASSCODE for its simplicity and flexibility.

“We wanted a solution that could offer a really simple approach to MFA, and SMS PASSCODE did exactly what we wanted it to do,” explains Donovan Le, Network Systems Manager, Portland Trail Blazers. “Installation was simple, it worked right out of the box, and managing it has also proved to be really easy.”
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DONOVAN LE,
NETWORK SYSTEMS MANAGER
AT THE PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS

Currently, there are around 115 users actively using SMS PASSCODE, but more will be added as the solution is rolled out across the organization, with a goal to have 200 on-board for the first stage of implementation.

When a login attempt is made via the VPN, users are sent an SMS to their phone to verify who they are. If this verification is unsuccessful, they will receive an email and finally a phone call if previous methods have not worked.

“Users have found it very straightforward and, given the fact that a lot of people already use similar authentication technology for their banking, it wasn’t a big change for many. Staff are very aware that personal information is being stolen on a daily basis around the world, so they are happy to have it.” continued Donovan.

Value in peace of mind
The organization now has greater visibility over who is accessing its system and from where, as well as peace of mind that those users are who they say they are. SMS PASSCODE also enabled the Trail Blazers to get a better grip on passwords across the organization – an unexpected benefit.

“We could see when users had passwords that did not meet our requirements. There were a number of passwords that adhered to legacy policies but not to new ones,” explains Le. “SMS PASSCODE helped us find users who weren’t compliant with their password and forced them to make them stronger.”

As for the ROI from SMS PASSCODE, Le says that this is difficult to calculate, but simply having the tools in place to stop malicious login attempts presents a clear return on investment. In addition, it has had a positive impact on staff who feel more secure knowing their information is protected. Le says, “The security landscape is at the forefront of people’s minds these days, with big-name organizations being compromised left, right and centre. So just everyone knowing that their company is protecting their information means the ROI is there.”

Looking to the future
The Trail Blazers will continue to roll-out SMS PASSCODE to users who require access from outside the network and is looking at potential further use cases for the authentication technology. Currently, the NBA team is considering using it for access to webmail and Active Directory logins for administrator accounts to ensure it is actually administrators logging in.

“SMS PASSCODE is everything I hoped it would be, and I’m very happy with the product,” concluded Le. “With plenty more functionality available, I hope we’ll be able to explore some more uses down the line, to provide our staff with the further layers of protection they value.”