



# Donker Groep has an integrated, secure environment thanks to Sophos solutions

Donker Groep, founded in 1961, is active in landscaping. The 850 employees know everything about indoor and outdoor greenery, such as designing, constructing and/or maintaining [circular] indoor and outdoor gardens and parks, landscape architecture, natural playgrounds and [ecological] green maintenance with resident participation. Donker Groep takes care of the entire process, from the first pencil sketch to the festive opening. This integral, comprehensive approach is unique in the Netherlands. In addition, the company is a top 3 player in the Netherlands that works for various governments, companies, and institutions. Donker Groep consists of three divisions: Donker Design, Donker Groen, and Donker Interieur. The company has 26 locations in the Netherlands and Belgium.

## CUSTOMER



**Donker Groep**

**Industry**  
Landscaping

**Website**

[www.donkergroep.com](http://www.donkergroep.com)

**Number of staff**

850

**Sophos Solutions**

Sophos XG Firewall  
Sophos SG UTM (FullGuard license)  
Intercept X Advanced with XDR  
Sophos AP 55 and AP 100

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Auke Brattinga, Network Manager at Donker Groep

Working in landscaping is inextricably linked to the climate. Due to climate changes, it is becoming increasingly important to design indoor and outdoor spaces in a sustainable way. This idea has been ingrained in the DNA of the company since it was founded, but now, it's more important than ever. In addition, Donker Groep wants to fully operate in a sustainable and circular manner by 2035, without negative impact on the environment and with a restorative contribution to the earth and everything that lives on it. To achieve this goal, the company has been engaged in an intensive change process since 2013: from a landscaping company to a 'green' company (sustainable and circular). A sustainable future is only possible if many parties work together. That is why Donker Groep fulfils the role of 'green guide' when working together with

customers, governments, universities, suppliers, colleagues, and collectives. To ensure that all employees at the various locations can perform their work properly, it is important that the IT environment is well integrated and secured.

## **Many different solutions from different suppliers**

Auke Brattinga, Network Manager at Donker Groep, manages the infrastructure environment together with a colleague. They are responsible for the connections between the branches and for security. Brattinga: “We used to purchase several security solutions from different suppliers. For example, a spam solutions from supplier Y, antivirus solutions from supplier X, and a firewall from Microsoft. We had to manage all these individual

solutions separately, which is time-consuming. In addition, employees needed knowledge of all the different solutions and packages, which was also a challenge.”

## **One integrated environment**

Donker Groep was using a firewall product from Microsoft, but Microsoft stopped the support of this product. Therefore, another product had to be implemented. This – and the fact that it was difficult to manage and required a lot of knowledge – was the reason for choosing Sophos. Brattinga: “A consultant from one of our previous IT partners who had implemented Microsoft's firewall for us, had done an extensive study comparing about 15 unified threat management systems. He was very enthusiastic about and charmed by Sophos’



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[Auke Brattinga, Network Manager at Donker Groep](#)

network protection solution. He thought Sophos SG UTM was by far the best system because it was the most user-friendly, had the best performance, and had the most features. We came to the conclusion that it was a very nice package and that Sophos SG UTM was the best fit for Donker Groep.”

By implementing the network protection solution and scaling down the individual solutions, Donker Groep had fewer separate security solutions. It had one integrated environment in which many security services could be purchased and managed. Brattinga: “This made management much more pleasant for us. We can now manage many security solutions through the Sophos environment or have them managed by our IT partner NetStream.”

More Sophos products were added to Donker Groep’s environment. Brattinga: “Sophos is good at integrating solutions into one platform. That is why we added multiple Sophos products for network protection and security that were a welcome addition to the services that we still wanted to implement, or to services that we previously purchased as an individual service elsewhere and could now terminate.”

## Support by IT partner NetStream

One of Donker Groep’s previous IT partners, who had advised to choose Sophos, outsourced the hardware support to another partner, NetStream. That is how Donker Groep came into contact with them. NetStream is Sophos Platinum Solution Partner, the highest attainable status at Sophos. They were also Partner Award Winner 2021. The company designs, implements, and maintains security solutions and offers central control over all aspects of network security. In addition, NetStream has been providing network, information security, and work from home solutions for over 20 years. Brattinga: “NetStream advised us on the Sophos services and implemented the solutions.



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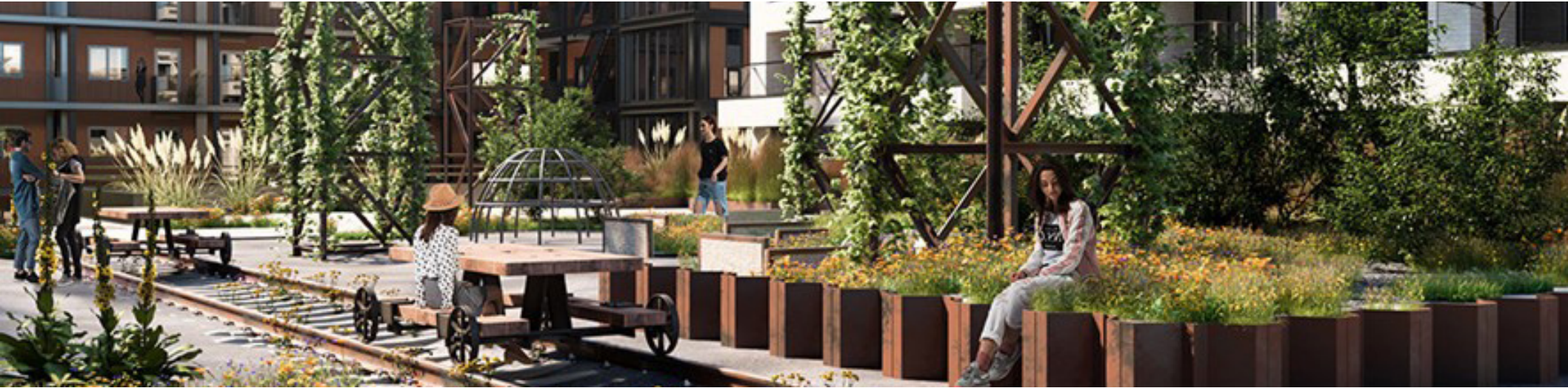
They also manage and monitor the Sophos firewalls and the created links/connections, they ensure that the firewalls are updated, and if there is a malfunction we can contact them immediately. They take a very large part of the management of the Sophos environment off our hands. If there is a malfunction, they contact us immediately, 24/7. We have been working with NetStream as a Sophos partner for about 5 years now and we are very satisfied with them, they do their job very well. Especially considering that, as a small party, they were able to link and manage our 18 branches via Sophos: respect!”. Because the company is a small party, a customer is a customer and not a [ticket] number. Jeroen Houniet, Account Manager at NetStream: “NetStream provides a 24x7 security service that relieves the entire IT department of Donker Groep. Thanks to Sophos Central,

among others, NetStream is able to act 24x7 and proactively in the event of a disaster. After all, crime doesn't take a break.”

## **A secure connection between all branches**

Donker Groep had a software firewall solution, the virtualized version of Sophos SG UTM as a VM on a Hyper-V Host. IT partner NetStream advised otherwise. Because there were more VMs running on this host, the performance fluctuated too much and NetStream advised to purchase dedicated hardware from Sophos. So NetStream replaced all software firewalls with hardware solutions from Sophos and advised on which Sophos subscriptions to buy. Brattinga: “That was also the reason to continue with NetStream and to provide all other

branches with network protection from Sophos, with site to site VPN. Using Sophos, NetStream helped us connect the different sites. Previously, we could not provide the site to site VPN ourselves, so we outsourced it to a large telecom party. But with the Sophos environment, NetStream was able to do this much cheaper and easier by facilitating the site to site VPN on the internet. Previously, this was done via one central internet connection from Sneek. This roll-out coincided with the roll-out of our own internet at all the branches. As a result, the branches have a direct, secure connection to all services that the headquarters offers and they form one large network. Thanks to our Sophos environment, anyone, regardless of location [office or from home], can securely connect to our network and the services that we facilitate from our headquarters in Sneek.”



Jeroen Houniet, Account Manager at NetStream: "NetStream watches over the Donker Groep locations 24x7. Proactive action is taken in the event of a calamity or, for example, in the event of a hardware defect. We also provide advice on security policy and help with support regarding the LAN and WLAN network."

## Work safely and everywhere

Brattinga: "We currently have 18 branches equipped with a Sophos SG UTM. We have purchased the FullGuard license for all locations. This means that we have the complete bundle with all security features that Sophos offers. For example, when users access the internet at a branch, the solution ensures that the traffic is filtered and that employees are protected against attacks from outside of the company".

Donker Groep has also implemented an endpoint protection solution from Sophos, so an antivirus tool is available at the workplaces. This software also functions proactively instead of reactively and analyzes data flows, for example. Brattinga: "Using the Sophos environment, we facilitate VPN Client at the workplaces, so even if employees work from home, they can connect to the company

network. We make the user very happy with this option". According to Brattinga, it is beneficial if a user is hindered as little as possible by the security solutions that you have implemented as a company. He thinks this is a big hidden benefit for the end user. "If a user is often confronted with notifications or matters where we as IT have to intervene, then security will work against you. And we don't have that with the Sophos environment. It runs in the background, we can roll it out centrally and it doesn't bother the user at all. And it is very safe: if there is something on a PC that can disable your entire network, the PC will be removed from the network. If the filter is too strict, it can be adjusted so employees are not hindered in their work."

In addition, Donker Groep facilitates WiFi with the Sophos WiFi access points. Employees have access to all the resources they need in the network and guests have access to the internet. Donker Groep is also thinking about using the Sophos user portal – which is an option in the UTM – to facilitate users to take actions themselves via the portal, which is currently still centrally controlled. Think about, for example, indicating that a URL is incorrectly blocked.

## The future

Due to the multiple branches and the diversity of applications at Donker Groep, SD-WAN is crucial according to NetStream. Houniet: “Sophos SD-WAN can make an organization extremely flexible, intelligent, and secure. Total control over performance, applications, and associated security combined in one management portal. Donker Groep is not using this yet, so this is a good goal to work towards in the future.”

NetStream will soon assist Donker Groep with the migration to the latest generation of firewall solutions. Brattinga: “We are very satisfied with the Sophos implementations, so for us that is the reason not to replace the solutions with another brand, but simply replace it with a new Sophos product. We are going to update because the current cluster does not support the type of VPN we use now and because the new versions that have been released offer more services.”

Furthermore, Microsoft now arranges security for sharing documents and making them available, there is no Sophos solution in between. Brattinga: “Sophos is actually more located in the network layer of Donker Groep, not in the network layer of the Microsoft platform.” Donker Groep has thought about adding Sophos to Microsoft’s network layer, so perhaps that will happen in the future. An own connection to Azure can be interesting, especially for the larger branches. By choosing this configuration, the traffic that normally goes directly to the Microsoft platform will go through the Sophos environment first so there is an extra layer of protection in between. Whether Donker Groep will implement even more solutions in the future depends on the business needs. In any case, Donker Groep is very satisfied with Sophos and NetStream, so that won’t be the dealbreaker.



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