Pioneering Engineering Cloud IT Organization Partners with Sophos Gold MSP to Expand Services and Achieve Competitive Advantage

For over a decade, EpiGrid has been recognized as a pioneer in private and public cloud engineering and manufacturing solutions. EpiGrid offers a value-added managed hosted cloud service for SOLIDWORKS, the leading supplier of 3D computer-aided design (CAD) engineering software. EpiGrid assists engineering customers with product data management (PDM), which requires a high level of IT infrastructure competence.

CUSTOMER-AT-A-GLANCE

EpiGrid LLC

Industry
Engineering cloud solutions

Number of Users
500+

Sophos Solutions
Intercept X for Server
Intercept X Advanced Endpoint
Virtual Sophos Firewalls

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Challenges

- Replacing a legacy network that restricted the ability to develop new services and products
- Improving network performance and providing end users with easy and fast access to network resources
- Implementing a unified security solution for customers that addresses today's volatile threat landscape
- Expanding the scope of its portfolio with an emphasis on comprehensive security

A few years ago, SOLIDWORKS approached EpiGrid and asked the organization to become an authorized reseller. EpiGrid embraced the opportunity and spun off a new company, Converge Design, to market EpiGrid IT cloud services along with Solidworks products, dubbing the offering "SOLIDWORKS Hosted -as-a-Service (SHaaS)." Converge Design and EpiGrid have teamed up to provide an IT platform for engineers that meets CAD data management and distribution needs.

This move helped accelerate EpiGrid's growth path and more than doubled their customer base over a three- to five-year period, largely because engineering firms have increasingly sought to offload their CAD and IT burdens so they can focus on designing products.

How does a market leader further grow and increase its competitive advantage?

As a result of soaring growth, increased competition, a need for greater scalability, and an expanding threat landscape, EpiGrid found itself at a crossroads. It had outgrown its existing hosting architecture and needed to elevate its security posture. Additionally, the organization believed that its legacy architecture did not lend itself to the development of new service offerings. CEO of EpiGrid, Chad Garrish, decided to seek out a new hosting provider that could better support their customers with a global hybrid cloud infrastructure and a unified network security solution.

"We found ourselves unable to develop new offerings that could address some of the performance and security concerns of our customers and that would further differentiate us from competitors. There's

been a swell in ransomware and malware attacks, and we knew we had to evolve our solutions to better address scalability and our customers' security challenges, especially since one of their biggest concerns is safeguarding valuable data and intellectual property," he says.

There were two key considerations that prompted this move; security and scalability. First, EpiGrid was intent on improving time to market.

How did MSP Virtual Sprout fit the bill for EpiGrid's architecture overhaul?

During the evaluation process, Garrish was impressed by managed service provider (MSP) Virtual Sprout, a Sophos Gold Partner headquartered in Ohio that offers a comprehensive set of professional IT services and products, including security. Garrish and his team were already well aware of the breadth of the Sophos portfolio and its position in the marketplace—from endpoint security to next-generation firewall technology to managed threat response services—and how these solutions had helped many of EpiGrid's own customers.

"Once we understood that Virtual Sprout would provide us with the opportunity to have a single, centrally managed, end-to-end Sophos network solution across our global data centers, the decision was simple," affirms Garrish.

Moving EpiGrid's more than 100 customers to a new hosting provider was far from a trivial task. However, Virtual Sprout rose to the occasion and quickly set up a network between EpiGrid's data centers that provided an efficient platform for migrating customers to the new solution.

Virtual Sprout implemented an end-to-end secure Sophos network solution that connects three domestic data centers and Microsoft Azure across five continents to provide EpiGrid and its customers with maximum connectivity and the lowest possible latency, resulting in improved network performance and robust security.

How did Virtual Sprout leverage Sophos in building a solid technology foundation for EpiGrid?

Jamie Busic, CEO of Virtual Sprout, describes the technology foundation for the new EpiGrid network. "One of the key requirements was to provide lateral isolation for each of EpiGrid's customers. We used Sophos firewalls in the data centers to segment the customers from each other while allowing them to access common centralized resources as appropriate," he explains. "We also overlaid the servers with Sophos Intercept X Advanced for Server to provide the latest protection against malware and ransomware. And we utilize Sophos Synchronized Security to perform isolation when infections are detected on assets hosted on our platform in order to prevent any kind of damage across the network."

Virtual Sprout feeds all security alerts into the cloud-based Sophos Central management platform to get a global view of security posture and potentially malicious activities in the EpiGrid environment and to drill down into each EpiGrid customer. Previously, it would take EpiGrid several weeks to get a comprehensive view of the multiple data center implementations for its customers. In contrast, with the Sophos network framework architected by Virtual Sprout and the single-pane-of glass management console, it only takes a few hours to gain insights into network activity.

For Garrish, this was a major selling point: "Once I understood that I could have the same security network and a single meshed network not just for the domestic data centers but also for the public cloud, I was sold. We now have centralized reporting, and everything is under one umbrella. That was super-attractive to us and something we have never been offered before."

According to Busic, Virtual Sprout can provision a customer quickly and rapidly pivot to any EpiGrid customer to view their security posture. Additionally, Virtual Sprout enables EpiGrid customers to have global reach to assets in multiple data centers. End users can easily and safely access the platform via the Sophos Connect remote-access VPN or via point-to-point VPN from third-party Internet Protocol Security (IPsec) firewalls.

"Sophos gave us a ubiquitous, universally compatible platform that we could build on for EpiGrid, with next-generation firewalls running inside of the Virtual Sprout cloud and within Microsoft Azure," observes Busic.

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How does Sophos security benefit EpiGrid and its customers?

With the new Sophos-protected architecture in place, EpiGrid has seen immediate improvements in its ability to deliver its cloud-based services—from a significant boost in performance due to the reduced latency and better network stability to stronger security and a definite competitive advantage.

The new environment is also easier to manage and distribute and offers comprehensive visibility and protection. From a strategic standpoint, Garrish points out that this is one of EpiGrid's biggest differentiators, as the data stored on the platform by EpiGrid's customers is vital intellectual property—designs, patents, methods—created by their engineering teams. If that is lost or stolen, it could have a crippling effect on customers.

"Recently EpiGrid competitors offering a 'me-too' solution have joined the fray, but we stand out from the crowd. With our offering, we really differentiate ourselves from a security standpoint. What I have always said is that if we can prove to our customers that we can fully protect their intellectual property, the rest is easy," he asserts. "Knowing that we have gone to such lengths to protect their valuable information on our platform is not common in our space. One thing that customers gain from EpiGrid is peace of mind. With the help of Virtual Sprout and Sophos, we're casting the mold for EpiGrid for the next five to 10 years in our market segment."

EpiGrid and its customers also experience significant benefits on the network side. As Garrish explains, "The applications our customers use generate very large files, and a low latency network is critical when moving data. Likewise, we see improved user experience on our Virtual Desktop Interface (VDI) customers, where latency can affect the responsiveness of the user interface."

He also has observed notable improvements in network stability, particularly for customers with remote users who rely on the Sophos Connect VPN to access the network. The number of support cases related to connectivity issues in EpiGrid's ticketing system has dropped substantially.

"Our ability to offer a global hybrid cloud solution protected by the industry leader in cybersecurity is a major competitive differentiator and has cleared the path for us to confidently scale our business," remarks Garrish.

What's in store for the future for EpiGrid and Virtual Sprout?

With a strong security foundation and robust network architecture in place, EpiGrid has big plans for the future. Garrish looks forward to packaging even more "as-a-service" capabilities into his company's offering. Among these are Desktop-as-a-Service, which is supported by their low-latency network and the ability to communicate between multiple locations. Garrish and his team are also devising a solution that will take advantage of secure network segmentation. The goal is to provide more services that will lower costs for customers.

"Ultimately, it will be a win for our customers. We plan on educating our customers about the malware and threats that are out there and follow with our powerful security message," says Garrish. "We are in a position to combine Virtual Sprout's expertise in data security, redundancy, and backups with some of the cybersecurity technologies that Sophos Intercept X has, such as CryptoGuard, which rolls back unauthorized encryption of files in seconds after a ransomware attack. We can be creative and put certain products and services together to differentiate ourselves further."

Virtual Sprout supports this trajectory by looking at ways that make the access experience seamless and simple for EpiGrid's customers.

Busic also is looking at potentially up-leveling customer's security posture with Sophos managed threat response service to demonstrate to customers that his organization is not only helping to prevent infection, but also actively leveraging the Sophos team of experts to monitor threats 24/7 and perform swift remediation.

Virtual Sprout understands that EpiGrid's global footprint makes its risk profile more dramatic. And to that end, the MSP is leveraging Sophos tools that help EpiGrid work smarter and keep costs down without putting handcuffs on their customers. "Everything needs to be seamless and easy to use from a customer perspective," says Busic. "And Sophos helps make that a reality."

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Chad Garrish
Founder and CEO
EpiGrid

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