**SOPHOS**

# Sophos Provides Alabama Bank with the Performance, Flexibility, and Security It Needs to Expand

## Customer-at-a-Glance

**Peoples Independent Bank (PIB)** was ready to expand, it wanted to improve its network performance and security to ensure protection against ransomware and other next-generation threats. The bank contacted Syndesi Solutions, which recommended Sophos to accommodate the bank's growth and security needs.

**Industry**
Financial services

**Number of Users**
75 employees

**Sophos Solutions**
Sophos Central Endpoint Advanced · Sophos Intercept X
Sophos Mobile · Sophos SG UTM · Sophos RED
Sophos AP50 · Sophos AP55 · Sophos Server Protection

**Peoples Independent Bank** A customer success story

Peoples Independent Bank Shares is a fast-growing two-bank holding company that owns two Alabama banks: PIB, which has six branches, and First Bank in Wideley, with five branches. When PIB in Boaz decided to expand and open a new branch office, it needed a more cost-effective, scalable, and secure network solution than the current MPLS network and Fortinet firewall the branch had been using. PIB in Boaz also sought a more responsive service partner to help manage its network and security.

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**Geoff Freeman**
VP and CIO
Peoples Independent Bank

## Challenges

‣ Ensuring security solutions match the organization's complex environment and could scale to the business

‣ Securing bank-supplied mobile devices for branch managers and executives, enabling users to work safely regardless of location

‣ Protecting against ransomware and other advanced threats – a regulatory issue that raises concerns about potential loss of public trust

## Business Challenge: Lack of Responsiveness

PIB was operating on an MPLS network using Earthlink as an Internet Service Provider, but the network was really slow and expensive, among other issues. The bank looked at converting to a VPN system for its branch communications in hopes of improving connectivity and saving thousands of dollars a month, but the IT team was concerned about ensuring that proper security was in place before committing to this change.

To manage its Fortinet firewall, PIB had been using a third-party IT service company in Atlanta. This made it difficult for PIB to make necessary firewall changes in a timely manner.

"We had to delay network projects because we couldn't get the service company to respond in a reasonable amount of time. It would take days for a simple rule change or an addition to be made. Whenever we had a project scheduled, it was an issue for the IT service company," describes PIB's VP and CIO Geoff Freeman. "If we are unable to process loans or print out paperwork, then we're not making money. Any time the system is down is a loss of not just revenue but more importantly customer confidence."

To compound the problem, the bank was already paying a premium of the Fortinet service, even though the third-party company provided the service, not Fortinet.

PIB considered deploying a new firewall but thought the change might be too costly and worried about the turnaround time to get a new firewall up and running. Fed up with the Atlanta vendor, Freeman contacted Syndesi, the bank's IT solutions provider since 2009, which leveraged their extensive knowledge and experience with Sophos products to assuage Freeman's fears.

"We brought in Sophos and showed Geoff what Sophos was capable of. Needless to say, Geoff was impressed," explains Syndesi Vice President Paul Gibbs, adding that the system was intuitive enough for the PIB team to make changes easily. At the same time, when help was needed, Syndesi could respond rapidly and effectively.

"Now we can make IT and security changes quickly and keep our projects moving. We're a small and agile group, and we're able to serve our customers at a much faster pace," says Gibbs.

In addition to its complexity, the Fortinet firewall had no content filtering and offered no security to the branches — two things PIB needed, especially if it were to expand. Syndesi solved these problems with Sophos SG UTM firewall, which provides the content filtering PIB required, along with the flexibility needed for high-performance branch office connectivity.

Sophos UTM not only offers comprehensive and effective sandboxing protection, visibility, and analysis to combat ransomware and targeted attacks, it also provides an easy-to-use, intuitive interface that makes day–to-day management tasks and changes easy for Freeman and team. The Sophos SG UTM is designed to be powerful and fast, giving PIB the performance it requires to customize its security status, get notifications, and recover passwords. At the same time, Syndesi can use it to manage the installation

and license remotely, providing the responsive service PIB needs to keep their bank branches secure.

The Sophos SG UTM is easy to manage through its centralized console, offering dashboards for both partners and customer users. Through the partner dashboard, Syndesi can remotely manage the installation, respond to alerts, and keep track of licenses and renewal dates. Through the user dashboard, the bank IT team can customize their security status, receive notifications, and recover passwords. In addition, the easy and quick setup was a major advantage for busy IT department.

## Meeting Compliance Mandates

PIB wanted to ensure that the solution chosen would comply with FDIC requirements, and would make reporting easy, particularly in the event of an audit.

"We wanted to make sure that the different regulatory agencies were okay with the type of reporting you could get from the firewalls," explains Freeman. Gibbs assured him that Syndesi had deployed Sophos products in other banks, which ultimately had no issues with regard to adhering to FDIC regulations.

"Anything cyber-related is a compliance challenge," Freeman states. "The FDIC is asking for increased security with our due diligence. Nobody can be 100% secure, but we want to mitigate our risk as much as possible — and Sophos does that for us."

## Safeguarding Employees on Mobile Devices

In his quest for the right solution, Freeman was interested in mobile security to protect employees working with devices provided by the bank.

"We have bank-supplied phones for our branch managers, and we have Apple iPads for our board members," remarks Freeman. "The bank provides several devices to key personnel so they can do business wherever they go. But now you have information that's running out to several devices. How are we governing what happens on those devices? They could wind up lost, stolen, or in the wrong hands."

"Recent cases involving high-profile companies that made the news illustrate just how much personal and business information we have on our phones," adds Gibbs. "It could affect the trust of the community

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**Paul Gibbs**
Vice President
Syndesi Solutions

bank through leaked information like emails and phone numbers. It's considered a high risk now."

Freeman is well aware of the potential costs associated with noncompliance resulting from breaches — from heavy fines and loss of reputation in the community to audits and surplus security investments required after the fact.

The Syndesi team told Freeman about Sophos Mobile, designed to keep users' mobile devices secure without hindering their productivity. Sophos Mobile not only enforces device security policies and remediates problems automatically, it helps separate personal and corporate data into containers. Likewise, it encrypts all the data on the device, without impacting worker productivity.

Freeman and his team trusted the consistently good advice from Syndesi and started rolling out Sophos Mobile. Once Syndesi showed the bank how easily Sophos Mobile integrated with the UTM firewall, the bank implemented Sophos Central to further strengthen their network protection, managing all of these solutions through a single, effective, easy-to-use interface.

## Combating Ransomware and Boosting Endpoint Security

In response to the bank's ransomware and compliance concerns, Syndesi introduced Freeman to Sophos Intercept X. Intercept X anti-malware and anti-exploit technology strengthens endpoint security, preventing malicious, spontaneous encryption of data, even on files or processes that have already been hijacked. After intercepting and remediating the ransomware, Intercept X's CryptoGuard technology reverts files back to their safe states.

Syndesi knew Intercept X could help with PIB's compliance concerns: The Intercept X includes a powerful root cause and analysis tool, which shows the cause of an attack and its infection path. A report detailing the attack and remediation steps taken can be generated and sent to the FDIC or anyone else who needs to see it.

"Mainly, we're concerned about communications from FDIC and the impact that ransomware can have on a bank. The loss of public trust and any threat to our customers could be devastating," expresses Freeman. "People do not want to bank with an organization that's not secure. Our mission is to mitigate that risk as much as we can."

"Intercept X is a solution that deals with an extensive security problem," Gibbs adds. "Having the comfort to know you are protected from ransomware and browser exploits gives you peace of mind."

## Savings, Scalability, and Security

For PIB, what started out for as a need to ensure security for its new branch turned into finding solutions that would strengthen protection at all its branches, providing the organization with the flexibility it needed to scale further in the future.

"We were opening a brand new office, so we purchased the Sophos firewall. Originally, we were looking at communication costs and the internet VPN. That's what led to the first purchase. When we saw how effective the firewall was, we added Sophos to the other branches. We see Sophos as a security solution that can grow based on our needs – from a company and partner who truly understand us," explains Freeman.

Having a trustworthy product line in place like Sophos, combined with a solid commitment to its customers, also helped Syndesi Solutions inspire the confidence needed to unseat the existing vendor and win new business with PIB.

"Mainly, it's just good to know we have a responsive partner who will take care of any issues that may arise," observes Freeman. "We know each other well — we're not just an account number. Syndesi Solutions is clear about what we are trying to accomplish and the way in which we operate. Previously, we had to delay certain projects because we couldn't get firewall changes made in a reasonable amount of time. Now we can steadily keep the projects progressing."

Furthermore, changing to secure VPN using the Sophos SG UTM has saved the bank thousands of dollars a month compared to the MPLS solution they had in place previously, and provides the security needed at the branch.

"We were concerned about security using a VPN, but the Sophos product line solves that problem," discloses Freeman.

With help from Syndesi, PIB was able to put in place a simple, manageable, and scalable solution, without having to sacrifice security. Looking forward, the bank wants to improve protection of sensitive data with encryption solutions like always-on, multi-platform Sophos Synchronized Encryption.

"Rather than having multiple products from different companies, it simply makes sense to line up with a company that covers all our needs under one umbrella," comments Freeman. "We're pretty much Sophos end to end now. As we expand and grow, network integration will be much easier with the Sophos product line and the new methodology we've established in alignment with this positive change. "

# Start your free trial of Sophos Intercept X today.

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