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North Dakota Electric Company Plugs Into Activeworx Power



Cass County Electric Cooperative (CCEC) is a not-for-profit, customer owned electric distribution system serving over 30,000 members in an eight-county area in southeastern North Dakota. Headquartered in

Kindred, North Dakota, Cass County Electric has over 100 employees and 4 branch offices located in Fargo, Valley City, Lisbon and Arthur. Two of the smaller remote locations are tied in to the main office using a VPN, which presented Cass County with a challenge. Regulations require that Cass County Electric monitor the Firewall traffic over those VPN connections. However, that was not the only regulation in which CCEC has to comply.

Cass County Electric must also comply with PCI requirements because they accept credit card payments, GLBA because they provide loans for energy conservation upgrades and even HIPAA because they maintain some health records. In addition, CCEC also voluntarily complies with power industry specific regulations.

The North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) regulates power generation and transmission entities. While Cass County Electric is an electric distributor and not a generation utility, they follow NERC's regulations anyway. "If we were ever to do some remote control or use a SCADA system to have an effect on the electric system grid those regulations may apply to us." Says Tim Sanden, VP of Information Technology and CIO for CCEC, "They are good, solid and sensible standards so we like to comply with them."



While compliance was a driving factor for Cass County Electric, they had multiple goals when they began searching for a Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) solution. In particular, CCEC needed better management and visibility into system logs. "Anyone who has ever looked at system logs knows they are really unmanageable in

their native form.” Noted Sanden, “We had instances where we would want to discover something, or respond to a request about an event so we needed something that would consolidate logs across all platforms and make it very easy to look for specific events and report on them.”

The Report Engine was one of the reasons Cass County Electric chose Activeworx. “One of the big draws with Activeworx was the pre-configured reports that were designed to respond to those compliance requirements,” said Sanden, “We found that to be a really nice feature.”

Cass County started their search with no preference to whether the solution should be a hardware appliance, software based or even a managed solution. They researched all available products and looked for those that best matched their needs. They also used the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Guide to Computer Security Log Management as a primer. From this larger list, they honed it down to the ones that best matched their needs and budget. “We chose to do a trial with the one product that had the most features and flexibility and that was Activeworx.” Said Sanden.

“Set up was incredibly easy,” he noted. After downloading the Activeworx evaluation version, Cass County Electric took advantage of CrossTec’s free Technical Support. They guided CCEC through the install and configuration of the software. “It literally was up and running in a matter of hours,” said Sanden, “The ability to have a direct phone number to a knowledgeable tech support person is a great feature and selling point.” Sanden continued, “We tried to put the product through its paces during the trial period. Very quickly we realized it could do everything we needed to do and more.”

Cass County Electric liked the fact that Activeworx required very little in terms of staff time to operate Activeworx. “We wanted a solution that we didn’t need to baby-sit,” noted Sanden, “With Activeworx we were able to configure reporting and alerts to look for things that we wanted to see, and were required to monitor, so Activeworx really became our eyes on our logs and does the monitoring for us.”

Cass County Electric knows there is plenty of power in Activeworx left in reserve. “We’re very satisfied with the solution,” says Sanden, “It’s clear that we have really just scratched the surface of the capabilities within the product. We’re looking forward to expanding our use of it and getting more creative with the product in the months to come.”