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case study

EdFinancial Services achieves NIST 800-53 compliance for Service Accounts

EdFinancial SERVICES

BACKGROUND

EdFinancial Services, LLC provides customer-driven student loan servicing. Keeping their commercial banking and federal clients in mind, they strive for continuous improvement, streamlining their current processes and always looking for new ways to improve operational efficiencies and corporate compliance. Edfinancial is headquartered in Knoxville, Tennessee and has a satellite facility in Little Rock, Arkansas.

> **We wanted a centralized location to track which passwords needed to be monitored, change those passwords and keep track of who had access, [in a way that would] require no man hours.**

Joanne Wetzel
Systems Architect
Edfinancial Services, LLC

CHALLENGES

Government clients in the United States frequently have compliance requirements that must be met by their service providers. In Edfinancial's case, their client needed them to be compliant with the Federal Information Security Management Act of 2002 (FISMA). To do this, the largest portion of work for their organization to comply was FISMA's requirement to meet the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Special Publication 800-53 Information Security. NIST Special Publication 800-53 was created to help organizations comply with Federal Information Security Requirements for Federal Information and Information Systems. The guidelines apply to all components of an information system that process, store or transmit federal information.

Edfinancial identified two particular challenges of complying with NIST Special Publication 800-53 and other contractual obligations; to expire service account passwords at a minimum of every six months, and to better understand and control their network to proactively protect it against exploitation. Edfinancial was already meeting the NIST requirements manually, but it was a huge time investment, sometimes even requiring manual password changing after hours to address passwords used by employees that had left the organization. When meeting these challenges, Edfinancial also needed to be able to document their compliance for future audits.

SOLUTION

True to their company culture, Edfinancial knew they could improve their approach to meeting NIST requirements. First, they wanted a tool that provided a centralized location to keep track of what passwords and devices are on their network. This would allow them to more efficiently perform manual password changes.

Second, they wanted a solution that could automate the entire password changing process so they could reduce man-hours and meet NIST's automatic password changing requirements for changing passwords every six months.

Edfinancial deployed Secret Server in May of 2013. Joanne Wetzel, a systems architect, led the implementation and was able to do most of the setup herself while maintaining her other duties. Ms. Wetzel had Secret Server up and running in a few hours, using existing device lists to populate the tool with Edfinancial's approximately 200 service accounts. She recalled, "I only had to call [tech support] once, which is a sign of your good documentation!"

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When asked if she had any "lessons learned" that she would like to share with future Secret Server customers, Ms. Wetzel stated, "Think through how you want to group your accounts, what folder structure you are going to use, and what you want to accomplish with your folder structure, including password policies." Ms. Wetzel explained that this saves time down the road.

Ms. Wetzel used Thycotic tech support once, stating that she was impressed with the service provided. Her tech support engineer not only answered her question, but also noticed and helped her fix another issue.

> **The solution allows us to monitor and control who has access to passwords and because of that control we reduce the time required to make password changes.**
>
> Joanne Wetzel
> Systems Architect
> Edfinancial Services, LLC

BUSINESS IMPACT

Secret Server has already proven its value to Edfinancial. Ms. Wetzel has moved on to new opportunities but was able to teach others on the IT team how to react to employee turnover in-the-moment. They now have a central database of all passwords on the network, have assigned customized roles and permissions, and are using the audit trail.

Though Edfinancial has not yet completely rolled-out automatic password changing, Secret Server has helped streamline their process, already reducing their time spent changing passwords from 30 hours to 5 hours.

Once Secret Server is fully implemented, Edfinancial anticipates that they will spend approximately one hour of maintenance time per week on Secret Server related tasks.

Although Ms. Wetzel has departed, prior to leaving she made sure to transfer her knowledge and Edfinancial anticipates it will implement fully-automated password changing within 3-4 months. "We are taking the human element out of [NIST compliance]."

WRAP-UP

Secret Server is used by IT departments worldwide to secure privileged passwords and other sensitive data. Secret Server is the flagship product of **Thycotic Software**, a global provider of IT security solutions.

Organizations that provide services to the United States government can strengthen their IT security and meet NIST 800-53 requirements for password security by easily deploying Secret Server – secure access to admin and service accounts, improve productivity and reduce the potential for human error.

SECRET SERVER BUSINESS CASE

- Easy deployment.
- Low cost and time commitment to support.
- Flexible options for future growth.
- Centralized control.
- Full auditing and reports.
- Automatic password changing for Windows admin and service accounts.