axis security

Axis Case Study: Cardenas Markets

How Axis keeps a grocery chain well-stocked and well-protected

A grocery store chain lives and dies by its infrastructure and its partners: suppliers, importers, not to mention payment and credit card vendors. Fortunately, Cardenas is instituting new levels of security with the help of Axis.

Cardenas Markets offer a delectable specialty: the widest variety of foods and specialty products from Latin America. Jesús Cárdenas, a farmworker from Jalisco, and his wife Luz opened their first grocery store in 1981 in Ontario, California. In 2016, the chain was acquired by investment firm Kohlberg Kravis Roberts (KKR).

Today, dozens of Cardenas Markets can be found across California, Arizona, and Nevada. But as a company grows, its security profile needs to evolve.

> " Once a user logged in in, I couldn't control where they went afterwards. Most people just needed (to access) one application, one server, and we weren't locking it down at that level.

Prabash Coswatte, Former CISO (Cardenas)

When VPN isn't enough

For years, Cardenas Markets used a traditional VPN for everyone: suppliers, employees, managers, partners, etc. They used Bomgar for remote management of in-store processes like point of sale (PoS). This gave them a fairly secure way to access register data, but each machine required a client to be installed before connecting. An SSL VPN concentrator simplified things a bit, enabling certain Cardenas employees and third parties to access register data from a browser. This, at least, made the VPN client-free from the user side, simplifying deployment.

The VPN provided secure access, but it wasn't enough. A key issue was control: users were implicitly granted excess access to the network and other applications.

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> It didn't make me the favorite person in the office, but from a security perspective, the decision had to be made. The VPN was just too risky to use for remote access."
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> **Prabash Coswatte, Former CISO (Cardenas)**

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> I think it was probably less than a week before we kind of completely had it up and running on POC. It was one of those perfect matches."
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> **Prabash Coswatte, Former CISO (Cardenas)**

Security hits crisis mode

Unfortunately, the day came when Prabash discovered their VPNs were hampered by the company's outdated firewall, leaving them open to all kinds of security risks. Once he took stock of their vulnerabilities, Prabash shut down VPN access overnight.

It didn't help that this happened during the COVID pandemic, where hundreds of additional employees required work-from-home access. Prabash needed to scale accordingly to provide them all with remote access to a limited subset of applications – securely, with 2-factor authentication – and fast, without having to install complicated VPN routers.

Axis to the rescue

The solution came surprisingly quickly, before they even decided to institute a search. Prabash just happened to be speaking with a colleague from KKR, who recommended Axis Security. It was a match made in grocery heaven.

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Yes, I was the bad guy that shut everything down, but then I provided a way for everybody to get in, without using a VPN. To kind of have a solution already in hand, that fast? Huge.

It probably took longer to get the NDA signed. The Axis team has been great about delivering on new feature requests to meet our requirements. You can get that from a young company. I can't go to other companies, especially large ones, and have them respond this quickly."

Prabash Coswatte, Former CISO (Cardenas)

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Even today, even though we've upgraded our VPN, almost all our users who require some kind of system access from the outside are using Axis 100% of the time. It's easier for everybody."

Prabash Coswatte, Former CISO (Cardenas)

Security at lightning speed

Once he shut down the VPN, Prabash knew he needed to replace it as quickly as possible. Axis obliged, impressing Prabash almost as soon as they piloted the product.

The absence of client software meant that there was no need for user training, speeding up the adoption process. In fact, the time from initial conversations to getting the product up and running and getting everyone onboarded was about two weeks.

The responsiveness of Axis has turned Prabash and Cardenas into real fans of Axis.

User after user chooses Axis

Acceptance and adoption soon followed as Cardena employees and partners increasingly chose Axis over their VPN.

The fact that Axis is essentially device-agnostic has proven a considerable help. With Axis, they don't need to worry about installing a client on anyone's device. Prabash even uses his own iPad to access reports from home – no VPN required.

> "A traditional grocery has a lot of thick-client based products. There are certain applications, even at the store level, where I need a thick client to use it, or I need to give somebody access to a server. I can fulfill the request in literally minutes using Axis. And I don't have to worry about security or scaling issues.
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> If I can take a tool that's meant for security, and then make somebody's life easier, then I've done right by everyone."

Prabash Coswatte, Former CISO (Cardenas)

Clear cost savings

Prabash expects Axist to save Cardenas both time and money – not just from installing and maintaining fewer VPN clients, but from paying for fewer licenses as well. Currently, they pay for as many as 400 VPN licenses; Prabash thinks they can cut it down to 10 or 20.

With Axis already making a difference, Prabash is looking for the next opportunity to streamline.

Prabash has executed a mandate that all partners be granted access through Axis, not the VPN.

Want to learn more about Axis?
Download our free whitepaper here.