



# *the* SENTINEL

POWERFUL NETWORK DESIGN, SECURITY AND ACCESS CONTROL SOLUTIONS

## *the* POWER *of* PARTNERSHIP

**C**lassic Networking serves as proof of the value a skilled technology provider brings to both its partners and its clients. Founder and President Jeff Reed worked for various IT vendors before he and his wife Kathie launched Classic in June 2000. In that capacity he saw first-hand the need for a strong link between the vendor and the end customer.

“Vendors have a very different focus from ours. They are immersed in product development and market share and generally aren’t set up to delve into the details of a particular customer’s infrastructure,” said Reed. “Vendors are always looking for qualified resellers who know how to work with customers, put together network designs, and handle long-term maintenance and support. That’s our strength and the value-add we bring to the table.”

**Classic Networking provides customers with best-of-breed solutions and top-notch expertise in networking and security.**



It took a leap of faith to give up a good job in order to start a small business. But the Reeds quickly found a pent-up demand for the kinds of services they were offering. Customers as well as vendors recognized the need for Classic’s expertise.

“I had some very good relationships with big-name customers in the Mechanicsburg area that I had been personally supporting,” Reed said. “I went to them and explained what we were

doing and they were very receptive. We received our first order in August 2000 and reached about \$1 million worth of business before the end of the year.”

### Experience Counts

Classic has grown steadily over the past eight years to about 15 employees, but it remains somewhat of a family affair. Kathie no longer has full-time accounting and customer service responsibilities, but she continues to be involved behind the scenes. The Reeds’ elder son is part of the sales team while their younger son has completed Cisco training and is interning with the company during the summer.

Classic’s focus is on the core network infrastructure with particular emphasis on security. The firm has established strong relationships with key vendors in order to provide its customers with best-of-breed solutions.

“We sell Cisco products, SonicWall

CommunicationWorks

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## The Power of Partnership

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firewalls — a lot of routers, switches, wireless and security solutions. We're an HP ProCurve Elite Partner, which is the highest level of certification you can get with HP," said Reed. "But we're not just a sales organization. We work closely with customers to help them overcome their security challenges."

One such challenge is network access control (NAC) — preventing unprotected PCs and laptops from bringing down the entire network. Classic was a pioneer in the NAC arena, writing its own software before similar solutions came on the market.

"This was about four years ago, during the Blaster worm crisis," Reed said. "We have several colleges and universities as our customers, and they were getting infected with the Blaster worm through students' laptops. These unprotected laptops were bringing down networks that were thought to be bullet-proof.

"A vendor in New Hampshire had a product that required students to register their laptops before using the network. It tracked the laptop's IP address so we could determine where the malware was coming from. I realized that the next step would be to make sure each machine had up-to-date software patches and security. We wrote software to do that and licensed it to our New Hampshire partner. That code now has an installed base of several hundred customers."

### Vision for the Future

NAC has become a key product offering for Classic Networking — starting primarily in education and extending to customers in a wide range of industries.

"The education environment is the Wild, Wild West of networking. Imagine protecting your network against thousands of unknown laptops every single day," said Reed. "When corporate customers see what we can do in education — how we're able to protect a college's network against that kind of threat — they are immediately interested in what we have to offer."

Reed stresses, however, that Classic has the depth and breadth of expertise to serve a wide range of networking needs. From security assessments, to design and implementation, to on-site support, Classic offers a wide range of solutions to organizations throughout Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic states and beyond.

"Network security is one of the most important issues facing organizations today — particularly in the face of increasing government regulation. Sarbanes-Oxley, the Payment Card Industry standard and other regulations are putting pressure on organizations to increase their control over their networks," Reed said. "Our vision is to continue building upon our expertise, to take what we've learned and bring it to a broader range of customers."



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# A KNACK FOR NAC

*Leveraging outside expertise helps organizations reap the full benefits of network access control.*

Controlling network access is increasingly complex due to the growing number of mobile workers, branch-office employees, business partners, consultants and contractors who require admission to corporate networks. And they have more options for gaining that access with pervasive wireless connectivity and a proliferation of mobile devices such as smart cell phones and PDAs that exchange data with desktops, notebooks and wireless devices.

While all those devices and connections offer demonstrated productivity and collaboration benefits, they also create multiple avenues for introducing viruses, worms and other malware into an organization. That's why many organizations have begun implementing endpoint security solutions — also known as network access control (NAC) — that make devices prove they're secure before they are allowed to connect to the network.

"Compromised endpoints represent the biggest threat to sensitive network systems and protecting these has long been the primary goal for network administrators," said Frost & Sullivan Research Analyst Chris Rodriguez. "There are many endpoint security products avail-

able, and as a solution that ties many of these together, NAC will soon become an integral tool for network administrators."

## No Easy Fix

NAC is a combination of products, policies and services that enforce security policies for all devices using the network infrastructure. It extends traditional definitions of authentication, authorization and access control to include more detailed endpoint inspection. For example, the access control device could be configured to require clients to have current virus signatures and patch levels before allowing it to connect. Also, clients might be required to install critical updates and patches, as well as personal firewalls or other corporate security software. Theoretically, any property of the endpoint system could be used to define requirements for access to the network.

But there's a knock on NAC. To date, the technology has tended to be overly complex, too specialized and difficult to implement effectively. A fully executed network access system could require upgrades to almost every part of an enterprise's networking infrastructure. In a recent survey conducted by Forrester Research, approximately 40 percent of companies surveyed have tried to install NAC, but only 4 percent were able to complete the implementation.

In addition, there are many different opinions among vendors about the best way to implement NAC and where it should reside. Some vendors enforce policies using a client agent, some enforce them in the network, and some even use peers for enforcement. Network-based enforcement itself can take many forms, including dedicated gateway, DHCP manipulation, 802.1x authentication, and port- and VLAN-based enforcement on switches.

Nevertheless, NAC capabilities are

increasingly a must-have. Technology analyst firm Infonetics Research says that 80 percent of the large organizations it has interviewed plan to enforce NAC in the network, and 51 percent plan to enforce at the client, with some doing both. Infonetics also reported that the global NAC market grew 16 percent sequentially in the first quarter of 2008, hitting \$62.7 million. The research firm predicts NAC will continue to surge over the next five years.

## Go With the Pros

For most organizations, choosing the right technology partner will be the key to successfully implementing a NAC solution. Few organizations have anyone in-house with NAC experience, much less with knowledge of the dozen or more products on the market. A seasoned provider with multiple vendor relationships and experience deploying NAC inline, out-of-band and as a software agent offers the best chance of providing a solution that truly resolves unique security issues without being too much of a burden on users or administrators.

An experienced technology partner can speed the migration to NAC by assisting in the planning, design and deployment of a solution to ensure it integrates into the existing network infrastructure and supports future enhancements. A partner can also help with phased NAC implementations, which most experts prefer over an "all or nothing" approach to deployment. Phased implementations allow organizations to start small, testing NAC with small groups such as sales staff or wireless users to spot potential trouble spots before an organization-wide rollout.

Growing demands for network connectivity, combined with increasingly sophisticated threats, have raised the stakes for security professionals. NAC is an important tool for improving security, but it is not a silver bullet — there are potential downsides that must be considered. Enlisting the help of seasoned professionals in choosing and deploying the right NAC solution can avert unnecessary drains on budget and staff and help ensure a successful implementation.

## The Sentinel

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Editorial Correspondence:

4941 S. 78th E. Ave.,

Tulsa, OK 74145

Phone (800) 726-7667

Fax (918) 270-7134

Change of Address: Send updated address label information to the above address.

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