High-end Hi-Fi design and manufacturing company safely rides through the pandemic with Kerio Control

Chord Electronics Ltd.

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Introduction

Founded in 1989, Chord Electronics is a UK-based company that designs and manufactures high end Hi-Fi audio products for both consumers and professional use in studios. Chord produces a wide range of products ranging from power amplifiers to integrated amplifiers, preamplifiers, digital-to-audio converters (DACs) and portable music streamers. Selling directly to retail stores in the UK and through distributors around the world, Chord is one of the top companies in the global Hi-Fi market sector.

Matt Bartlett knows something about high-quality audio products. As Managing Director of Chord Electronics, a company with 30 employees most of whom work at their UK-based manufacturing site in Kent, Matt has had a long and rewarding experience working at the company. "I started with Chord Electronics Ltd when I was 15 years old," says Matt. "It was the perfect job for me as I have always had a love of electronics. Subsequently I went to university and gained a degree in Electronics Engineering and then went on to become a Chartered Engineer. I have now been with Chord for thirty years and over this period my view of our products has never changed— it has always been my goal to give our customers the best musical experience that any piece of electronics can give them along with the best service and support that is possible."

And as audiophiles and sound engineers around the world can readily attest, Chord does produce some of the best audio equipment available. Selling their line of products business-to-business (B2B) to over 200 separate businesses that cover the majority of the globe, Chord is one of the high profile players in the home and professional audio marketplace. And while this provides them with some significant market advantage, such visibility also comes with a price: it can make you a target.

Facing twin challenges

Online threats have intensified considerably since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Phishing attacks doubled over the course of the year according a report from the Anti-Phishing Working Group (APWG)[1]. The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) has stated that cybercriminals have been taking advantage of the business and social disruption caused by the coronavirus to mask their activities by embedding malware, spyware and trojans within websites hosting interactive maps of the virus activity[2]. Professional services industry giant Deloitte has described the impact of COVID-19 on cybersecurity as having created new challenges for businesses as they face a wide variety of different types of cyberattacks that not only involve targeting business networks directly but also by tricking end-users into downloading ransomware that is disguised to look like legitimate business applications[3].

[1] See https://apwg.org/trendsreports/ for details of the report.
[2] See https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Cybercrime/COVID-19-cyberthreats.
[3] See https://www2.deloitte.com/ng/en/pages/risk/articles/covid-19-impact-cybersecurity.html.

Coupled with these security worries is the additional challenge of shifting companies to the remote work approach. Sudden government-mandated lockdowns in many regions have forced businesses to quickly transition their employees to working remotely from home instead of at the office. Large enterprises like Microsoft, Facebook and Twitter are already planning on allowing their employees to work from home indefinitely for at least a portion of their work week, and global consulting firm McKinsey & Company predicts that hybrid models for remote work will likely persist after the pandemic[4]. Smaller businesses have not been exempt in this regard, and many have faced serious challenges in shifting to a remote workforce due to rapid onboarding of unfamiliar software and services needed for implementing remote work solutions.

With the additional pressures of needing to bolster your e-commerce capabilities and safeguard the physical and mental health of your employees, the twin job of keeping your business safe from cyberthreats while enabling employees to securely work from home can be challenging. Small- and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) in particular need solutions that are easy to implement, simple to use, and affordable.

The right solution

Matt himself confirms that Chord has not been exempt from facing these problems. The twin challenges of dealing with an escalating cyberthreat landscape and being suddenly forced to support a remote workforce would normally have been difficult for a small company like Chord. Fortunately they had already been working for a number of years with a trusted partner that provides premium IT solutions and services to SMBs. Invicta Linux, a trusted GFI partner based in the UK and which has a long history within the IT industry, had already previously provisioned Chord with a GFI solution called Kerio Control that has helped Chord safely ride out much of the stress affecting their business due to the pandemic.

"Previously, we were using Microsoft Small Business Server (SBS) with only simple security," says Matt. "The addition of a Kerio Control Unified Threat Management (UTM) firewall appliance has helped us reinforce both our security and the speed of our network." Designed especially for SMBs, Kerio Control helps protect your business from viruses, malware and various kinds of malicious activity that can signal attempts by malicious actors to breach your network defenses. Kerio Control also includes a next-generation firewall and router, world-class intrusion detection and prevention (IPS) functionality, and easy-to-use web content and application filtering to protect your network and improve user productivity.

[4] See https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/whats-next-for-remote-work-an-analysis-of-2000-tasks-800-jobs-and-nine-countries

And while the need for robust cybersecurity protection has been heightened because of the pandemic, there's another reason why Chord has to worry about being cyberattacked: their visibility as a top company in the field of high-end audio products. "Kerio Control includes perimeter anti-virus and threat prevention," says Matt, "and these have risen since our profile has increased." It may be a truism that the bigger you are, the more attention you draw, including attention that is unwanted. But this doesn't mean that you don't have to find ways of dealing with unwanted attention.

Another feature of Kerio Control that has been especially valuable to Chord during the pandemic is the product's built-in virtual private network (VPN) capabilities. By utilizing these capabilities your business can create a secure pipe between the corporate network and employees who are working from home. Remote workers only need to download and install the Kerio Control VPN client on their devices. They can then use the client to connect to the secure access point which is hosted on the Kerio Control appliance that sits on the perimeter of your corporate network. Chord saw these capabilities a lifesaver when their employees suddenly found themselves having to work from home. "Kerio Control allows us to work from home using the VPN facility," says Matt, "which has been especially useful during lockdown." And if Chord expands its operations in the future by growing to include additional sites, the additional VPN capabilities included Kerio Control, such as support for secure server-to-server connections with remote offices, may end up becoming invaluable.

Ease of use and deployment

Critical when smaller businesses consider buying into IT products is whether they are easy to use and deploy within their environment. Small businesses generally lack the in-house expertise and resources to properly install, configure, manage and monitor solutions that have the complexity associated with modern IT. Frequently such businesses partner together with an IT services company that can assist in dealing with some of these matters or even manage the solution entirely. This is in fact the case with Chord, which let its trusted GFI partner Invicta Linux handle the difficult parts of integrating Kerio Control with their network. "Kerio Control was installed by Invicta Linux, so I can't comment about the installation itself," says Matt. "But as far as I am concerned, it did not disrupt our business." And making sure there's no interruption to your business is a key sign of a good IT services provider whenever new technology is being introduced into your company.

Invicta Linux does most of the heavy lifting with regard to configuration, management and monitoring of Chord's Kerio Control appliance. "We predominantly just leave Kerio Control to do its job in the background without needing much user input," says Matt, "which is exactly as it should be." Designed to be transparent to end-users, Kerio Control's threat handling and VPN functionality should "just work" once it's set up and configured properly on your network. And while the product's intuitive web-based interface is mainly designed for administration, having access to it on Matt's side has made plainly visible the recent rise in cyberattacks Chord has been experiencing. "Threats are clearly visible via the web interface," says Matt, who also points out that knowing this from his side "makes working with Invicta Linux on potential issues very easy."

Kerio**Control** *uses a signature database to detect malicious activity.*
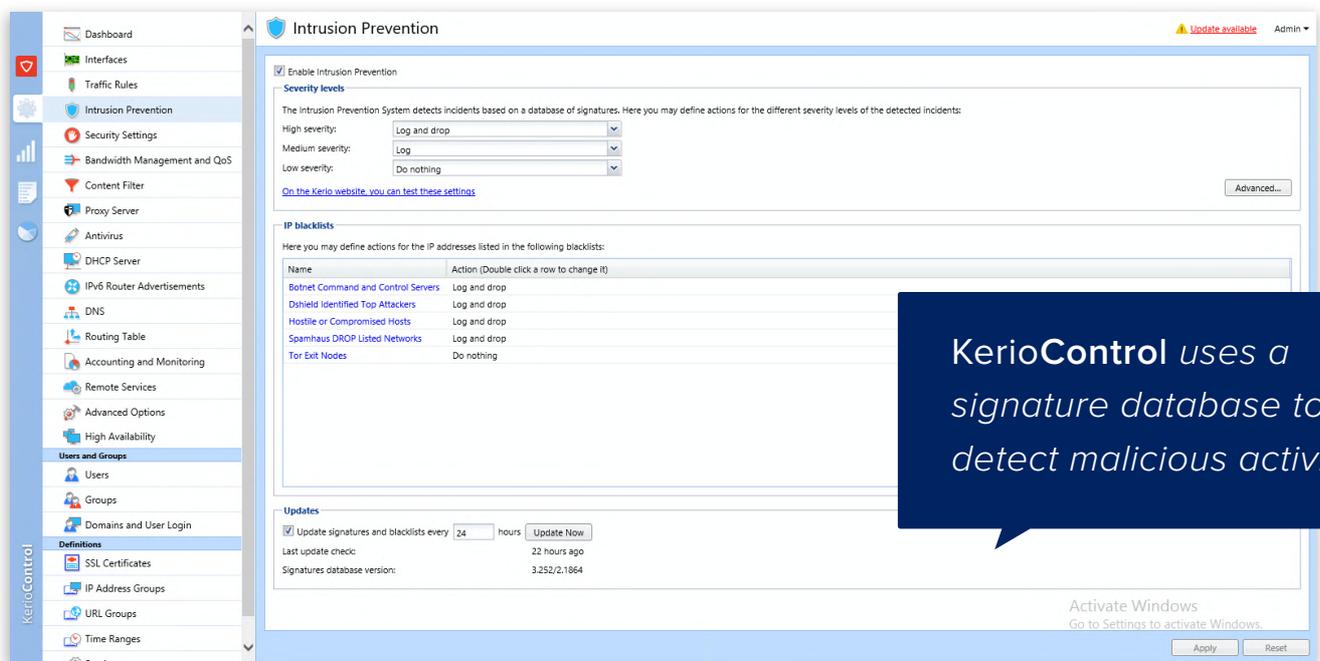
Nothing is perfect of course as there's always room for doing things better, especially in the fast evolving world of technology. GFI is well-known for listening to their customers whenever they have recommendations for ways the company can improve its line of products. "One thing I would like to see with Kerio Control," says Matt, "is the introduction of a 'simple' mode that would allow visibility of all the connected devices and status of the system. This would give an immediate overview at a glance and allow the potential to block or restrict access as necessary." Other than this suggestion however, Matt confirms that his "overall experience has been good" with the product. In other words, Chord has no complaints as Kerio Control has been just what their business needed for riding out this difficult time.

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Benefits and costs

The biggest benefit that technology can bring to a business is the ability to sleep well at night. Having Kerio Control on their network has accomplished this in the case of Chord Electronics. "I have more peace of mind and control than I had beforehand," says Matt. Having greater control over the security of your network can definitely result in such an assessment. The partnership they have with Invicta Linux also brings some added peace of mind to those like Matt who are overseeing Chord's various business activities. "The monitoring done by Invicta Linux ensures that the firewall in Kerio Control is kept up to date and as effective as possible," says Matt. Configuring policies for inbound and outbound traffic to thwart new kinds of threats requires technical expertise that many SMBs can't afford to invest in learning, so having a reliable partner like Chord has with Invicta to manage their cybersecurity is a godsend.

Naturally, smaller businesses often worry about the cost when looking at implementing new technology. Because of budgetary constraints, SMBs often compare different offerings before choosing the one to go with. With Chord however, this wasn't the case. "We didn't consider any alternatives," says Matt. "Kerio Control gave us the functionality we needed for an acceptable price." Has their decision paid off for them? "It's difficult to accurately quantify the return on investment (ROI)," says Matt. "But I will say that without Kerio Control (and also Kerio Connect) being installed, it would have made the last twelve months of working from home much harder, which would have had a huge financial impact on our business."

Boost user satisfaction
and cut user complaints

Partner with the best

One of many simple yet powerful software solutions from GFI, Kerio Control is the ideal choice for the small or mid-sized business that wants to safeguard the integrity of their network against cyberattack. Industry-leading customers like Chord Electronics can attest to the product's effectiveness as they rely on it for day to day protection against viruses, malware, and other threats in our connected world. Matt Bartlett unhesitatingly recommends Kerio Control as an "all-encompassing solution for small businesses to ensure both security and connectivity with employees." With its powerful and easy-to-use capabilities and flexibility of deployment options that include deploying it as a software appliance on your own hardware, as a virtual appliance running on VMware or Hyper-V, or as a dedicated turnkey hardware appliance, Kerio Control can integrate easily into your existing IT environment and is built for the SMB that needs to detect threats, block viruses and secure VPN connections for today's remote workplace. With different pricing options for different sized businesses, and also offered as part of a GFI Unlimited subscription, Kerio Control is fully supported by GFI and available through their worldwide network of distributors and partners. Try Kerio Control today and sleep soundly knowing your business has the best protection available.
For more information see gfi.com.