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Property Management in the Digital Age: Artis REIT's Security Transition

In the world of real estate investment, Artis REIT stands out as a forward-thinking organization, keenly aware of the unique security requirements of property management companies and the possibilities that technology offers. As a company that prides itself on efficiency, Artis focuses on initiatives to enable mobile work infrastructure with robust security.

The modern challenge to safely connect anything to anywhere

The journey to the cloud had already begun for Artis REIT before the pandemic hit, setting the stage for a more seamless transition to mobile work. However, the shift from a controlled office environment to a distributed workforce across various locations brought to light the critical need for heightened security measures. Eric Sawatzky, VP of IT at Artis REIT, recognized the urgency to tighten security in key areas, including:

- **Improved** security and productivity of their more mobile workforce transitioning into the digital workspace

- **Increase** the granularity of security policies, ensuring that users, building systems and IOT devices can access only authorized resources

- **Reduce** the complexity and time required to secure properties with their property managers and building operators, IOT devices, building systems, public spaces, and more

The complexity of managing a multitude of security tools also presented a significant challenge. Sawatzky expressed the company's desire for simplification, stating, "Our goal was to consolidate our security tools to minimize complexity and enhance our operational efficiency."

The collaboration with Cisco was a strategic move to harness the power of cutting-edge security solutions, ensuring that Artis REIT's employees and third-party contractors could continue to manage the company's extensive portfolio of properties without missing a beat.

ARTIS
REIT

Industry:
Real Estate

Location:
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Organization:
116 properties

Solution:
Cisco Secure Access

Architecting Artis REIT's remote infrastructure

With Cisco Umbrella already in their toolkit, Artis REIT was well-positioned to expand their security capabilities. The adoption of Cisco Secure Access was a strategic move that Sawatzky described as, "a pivotal shift that brought together various security products, including zero trust network access (ZTNA) and cloud firewall capabilities, into a cohesive system."

The ZTNA feature allowed the company to integrate seamlessly with their identity provider, Microsoft Entra ID, to implement conditional access controls. Sawatzky lauded the solution, saying, "ZTNA revolutionized our control over third-party access, providing us with the granularity and simplicity we needed, a vast improvement over our previous VPN system."

Achieving strategic secure connectivity

Implementing Secure Access simplified the process of securing buildings in their property portfolio. Sawatzky commented that although Artis is early in their implementation, they're already seeing "an over 50% reduction in VPN-related help desk tickets " He further elaborated, "Many of our users now experience seamless access, without needing a   client, thanks to the straightforward clientless access approach."

As Artis continues its Secure Access deployment, Sawatzky commented that a top priority is to "lock down" secure access for IOT devices, building systems and third-party contractors that come with any building. Tackling that requirement "has kept me up at night," but with Secure Access, Sawatzky commented that it's becoming a manageable and predictable process.

Additionally, the cloud firewall feature was instrumental in maintaining stringent security standards. Sawatzky emphasized its importance noting, "It's crucial that contractor traffic is funneled through secure tunnels."

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– Eric Sawatzky
Vice President of Information Technology,
Artis REIT

Next steps in security innovation

While Artis REIT has not fully implemented all capabilities of Cisco Secure Access, such as digital experience monitoring and AI-assisted policy creation, Sawatzky recognized their potential, stating, "We're looking forward to the AI features that promise to streamline policy deployment and enable our IT team to manage security with greater ease."

The move to ZTNA with Cisco Secure Access not only bolstered security but also significantly improved the user experience for both employees and contractors, with Sawatzky noting that user-friendly, integrated security infrastructure has revolutionized mobile work. "Our partnership with Cisco has been transformative, exceeding our security needs and reshaping our operational approach for the better."