



WhatWorks in
High Security Alternatives for Remote
Collaboration and Communications



WhatWorks is a user-to-user program in which security managers who have implemented effective Internet security technologies tell why they deployed it, how it works, how it improves security, what problems they faced and what lessons they learned. Got a story of your own? A product you'd like to know about? Let us know.

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Many businesses and government agencies have been forced to rapidly deploy commercial web video conferencing systems to support both their remote employees as well as sensitive business collaborations during a time when travel is not possible. Low-level attackers have had success disrupting or compromising many of the initial configurations and nation states are using more sophisticated methods to target government agencies, healthcare organizations and businesses.

During this SANS WhatWorks webcast, SANS Director of Emerging Security Trends **John Pescatore** will interview **Amanda Schnetzer**, Chief Operating Officer of Pointe Bello, a strategic intelligence consulting firm, to gain insight on their business need to securely collaborate across their remote workforce and with their clients, who are often targets of nation states.

Join John Pescatore and Amanda Schnetzer to hear details on the selection, deployment and experience using HighSide's Secure Team Collaboration product. This webcast will contain a discussion of lessons learned and best practices and give you the opportunity to ask questions to gain a deeper insight into HighSide's Secure Team Collaboration product.

Q Tell us a little bit about your background, about Pointe Bello, and the role you play there.

A I have spent most of my career in the public policy research field working with organizations to turn ideas into strategies, action and impact. My last stop along that way was working with President and Mrs. George W. Bush here in Dallas, helping stand up the George W. Bush Institute and bring their vision into action. Two years ago, I made a switch to the commercial sector when the CEO of Pointe Bello, Patrick Jenevein, came to talk to me about this early-stage strategic intelligence firm he had founded.

The company sits at the crossroads of global business and global politics, so it was a natural fit. Patrick ended up recruiting me as Chief Operating Officer to help build and grow the business.

Pointe Bello is a strategic intelligence firm. It was founded in 2016. Today we have offices in Dallas and in the Washington, D.C., area. Pointe Bello works with commercial businesses and public sector customers. We help them understand their global competitive landscape and then develop strategies to balance risks and seize opportunities.

Our services primarily consist of business intelligence, competitive intelligence and litigation support. We have a multilingual staff and, at this stage, have a particular expertise in helping our customers understand the nexus between economic activity and national security, which includes protecting private sector competitiveness, particularly as it relates to China. We look at PRC foreign technology acquisition programs and the impact that that has on intellectual property theft, for example. We help clients understand and respond to PRC strategies to gain market share and dominance in high-value areas like pharmaceuticals, automotive, artificial intelligence and robotics.

Q How does your role as COO of a relatively small services company relate to a traditional role of Chief Information Officer or Chief Information Security Officer?

A As a lean, early-stage company we've focused our headcount on the deep analysis areas where we are giving clients direct value. We deploy leading-edge managed IT security services and CISO on-demand support. So, to some extent I am both the CIO and CISO, but we take advantage of these outsourced services for both high-level strategic support and day-to-day operations.

Q What was the business driver that caused you to start looking at secure collaboration solutions like HighSide?

A There are three big ones. In no particular order, factor one is that we're a dispersed organization with offices in Dallas and the

Washington, D.C., area. We also have subject matter experts around the country who can parachute into project teams at any given time. Efficient and effective collaboration is really key for us.

The second is that we're a professional services firm working on important projects for our customers. So, maintaining confidentiality and being able to discuss business-critical plans and strategies with them is paramount.

The third factor is, as with many companies, we have compliance obligations. Staying on top of the technologies we use and the vulnerabilities those technologies might have is really important to our business.

Q Okay, so how did you go about looking for solutions?

A For many technology decisions we follow a typical process of defining requirements, evaluating options in the marketplace and then making

decisions. In this area, Pointe Bello needed collaboration capabilities immediately, so we essentially have been riding the bicycle while building it. We've tried many collaboration/conferencing applications, from solutions that come bundled with other productivity suites to the ones that have free consumer use and inexpensive business offerings. We haven't had a perfect formal process, but we have kept security at the top of the requirements list, along with reliability and usability.

There are a lot of claims out there about end-to-end encryption and debates about whether a product is secure or not. I've really leaned on outside expertise to help us make smart decisions. I've also been lucky that our CEO and founder was on board from the start with the need to invest in protecting customer and company information as a key element of meeting business objectives.

Q When did you select HighSide and start going operational?

A I've known Aaron Turner of HighSide for several years now, and we reconnected a few months ago, right before the need for secure collaboration really ramped up

for all of us. As I mentioned, we had tried other solutions, and we recently started evaluating HighSide. It was obvious that security is a key focus in the product, and that was very appealing.

We've only been operational for about a month, but so far, so good. We had management support for a quick rollout. I anticipated that most of the questions would come from our frontline users, but their response to HighSide's security features has been very positive. They have found the levels of security to be above other platforms we have tried.

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Q What was involved in deploying HighSide? Did you use HighSide tech support?

A We are a small organization, but it was straightforward to get going. There are two of us at Pointe Bello who are super admins. We were the first people to install HighSide. After that, we had a one-hour session with a member of the HighSide team to walk us through the platform, demonstrate the features and make sure we understood how to configure the various security policies. It's a user-friendly system. As somebody who is not a technology professional, I am proof of the pudding that the platform is user friendly and was easy for my colleague and me to understand.

Then I spent some time with that colleague looking at the settings and the policies, especially around unique features like the use of encryption keys to authorize users rather than usernames and passwords. We wanted to make sure we could explain this intelligently to others, both inside and outside our organization.

We also looked carefully at other features like location-based authorization, which allows you to use geolocation and put a "fence" around where people have to be located in order to join various conversations. We looked at the multifactor authentication options. And we looked carefully at the compliance log capability of the system.

We set the policies to get us started, and then I'm actually the one who pushed the invitations out to our team members to get up and running. There are good resources available from HighSide's support site to walk you through the admin side of the initial product launch, and getting-started resources you can share with your teams.

We've got about 10 people using the platform right now. We're a pretty lean company from a core users' point of view. But, like any company, we've got complexity. We have other employees, contractors, clients, maybe even some of our vendors that we plan to engage through the platform. Our number of users isn't vast yet, but handling the complexity of our network beyond the core team is important. One of the nice things about HighSide is that you can create different teams and channels to allow you to communicate with lots of different stakeholder groups.

Q Is HighSide something your employees can only use on their work machines, or can it be used from personally owned devices?

A One of the beauties of HighSide is that they have apps for all the major computer and phone operating systems. The use of an encryption key to authorize individual users

works across all of those. As I mentioned, that gives us confidence of authentication and authorization beyond traditional username/password if someone needs to work from another device.

This also gives us the flexibility and the security to use HighSide with individuals external to the company. They will have to download the app, but if we have provided them with the encryption key via secure means, we can extend trusted invitations for secure online meetings. If I wanted to say, "John, you need to be within a 200-foot radius of your office at the SANS Institute in order to participate," I can do that. And I also have the flexibility to then deactivate your profile after that and move forward. There's a lot of flexibility in being able to define the parameters of participation and then maintain those or modify them to meet operational needs.

Q Are there any lessons you've learned since going operational that, if you had known that when you got started, you would have done anything differently?

A Really, no. We've been very pleased with the experience so far. Our team feels good and more confident about the solution we're using now with HighSide. As we get deeper into our usage, I look forward to diving into the metrics and using HighSide's analytical tools. We might be able to learn things then that make us better or more efficient.

We are looking forward to when HighSide releases screen sharing, which is very soon. For now, the voice, video and secure document sharing features are working well for us.

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Q How have you found the tech support from HighSide?

A It's been great. The HighSide team has been very responsive to the range of basic and technical questions we've had. They've answered quickly and helpfully. So far, so good. I can't say enough about how responsive they are.

Q Anything I didn't ask that you'd like to bring up based on your experience?

A Given the nature of Pointe Bello and the work that we do, it has been important for us to get this right both for our business infrastructure and for our customers. We feel confident using HighSide, and we feel good going to our customers and saying, we've got this new secure solution that responds to the spikes in need and in security concerns highlighted during this COVID-19 period.