



Inside Track Research Note

In association with



# Network Security Solutions

The role of dedicated vs multi-function options

September 2015

*Trying to work out whether it is better to use dedicated best of breed systems or solutions that deliver a range of capabilities in a single appliance can be a difficult decision to make.*

## Introduction

IT Security is complex and trying to work out whether it is better to use dedicated best of breed systems or solutions that deliver a range of capabilities in a single appliance can be a difficult decision to make, especially if you are not a specialist in either security or networking. This is one of the reasons why network security solutions in small and mid-size businesses tend to be put in place and then left alone as much as possible.

## Security solutions deployed today

Freeform Dynamics recently asked a number of small and mid-sized businesses in the UK, Germany and France<sup>[1]</sup> how they implemented security against the backdrop of today's rapidly evolving threat landscape (Figure 1).

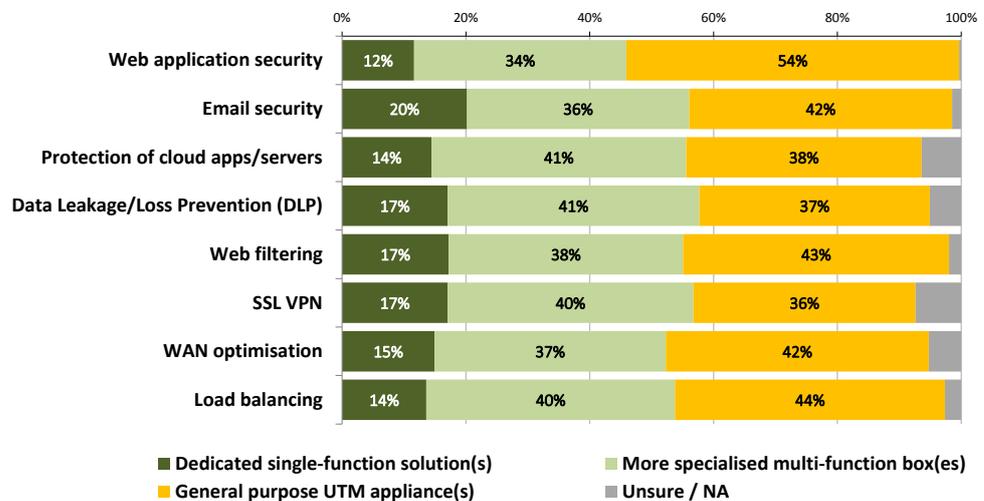


Figure 1  
How do you primarily implement the following functions in your network today?

As we can see, for the majority of SMBs in our survey, network management and security are currently delivered using appliances or software that combine multiple capabilities in a single solution. Only a minority of organisations make use of dedicated equipment. It is notable that given the very diverse range of security and network management areas covered, e.g. web application security, email security, DLP, web filtering, WAN optimisation etc., there is remarkably little difference in the approach taken to implementing each capability. Once a multi-purpose solution is in place, it is natural to exploit as many as possible of the functions it provides.

In many ways these results are as expected given that so few SMBs are able to employ IT professionals with specialist skills in each of these complex technology areas. Multi-function solutions are often built with ease of management and ongoing administration in mind, making them well suited for organisations where IT is administered by generalists.

## Preference for best of breed vs multi-function

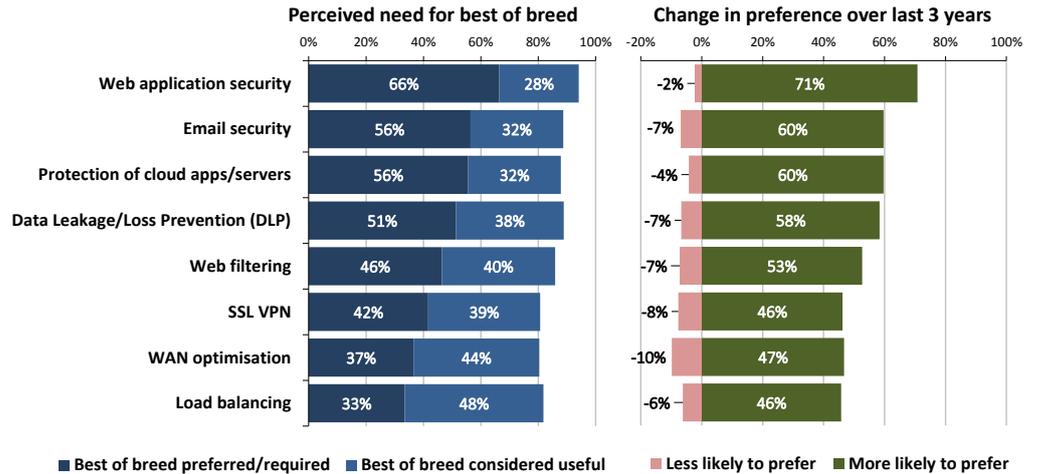
However, when questioned on preferences, it is clear that while multi-function devices are widely used, dedicated/best of breed alternatives are perceived to be more desirable (Figure 2).

### About this Inside Track

The research upon which this Inside Track is based was independently designed and analysed by Freeform Dynamics Ltd. 610 responses from business and IT managers/professionals were collected via an online survey across UK, France and Germany. The respondents were from organisations predominantly in the range of 25 to 1,000 employees and from a wide variety of industry sectors. The study was sponsored by Barracuda Networks.

Figure 2

How desirable are more specialised ‘best of breed’ solutions versus the use of general purpose UTMs, and would you be more or less likely to prefer/need a specialised solution today compared to 3 years ago?



*The perception is that single function solutions are more capable and offer ‘better’ protection than multi-function offerings.*

The chart also indicates that the preference for dedicated solutions has become even more pronounced in recent years. This change may well reflect the fact that many of those surveyed also report a wide range of escalating pressures and requirements being placed upon their networks, with such demands also expected to increase rapidly going forwards.

Against this background, the perception is that single function solutions are more capable and offer ‘better’ protection than multi-function offerings. The benefits cited include greater functionality, better performance and scalability, improved reliability and more flexibility.

Beyond this, with the increasing use of cloud meaning there’s often no longer a clearly defined single border to defend, the need to protect hosted environments by deploying security in the cloud is in the front of many peoples’ minds. As multifunction solutions, more than dedicated alternatives, have historically often only been delivered as hardware rather than virtual appliances, this is another perceived reason for favouring best of breed.

## Outdated perceptions

*Multi-purpose boxes may not be able to deal with extreme and exceptional requirements, but they have come a long way in the last few years.*

While such considerations can make the logic of emphasising dedicated/best of breed solutions seem clear, an important truth is that the underlying perceptions coming through are more often than not incorrect nowadays. Multi-purpose boxes may not be able to deal with extreme and exceptional requirements, but they have come a long way in the last few years. For most functions in many deployment scenarios, the difference between these and dedicated alternatives won’t matter significantly. Meanwhile, virtual appliance options of all kinds are now much more widely available in the market. You can even buy Application Delivery Controllers (ADCs) in virtual form.

With this in mind, the research highlights a knowledge gap among those looking after the communications infrastructure in smaller businesses. The challenge, however, is for SMBs to be able to find the time to investigate options, understand their capabilities and constraints, and then work out which solutions would best meet their needs. For some it may mean moving towards greater use of dedicated solutions while for others multi-function solutions, especially those developed in recent years, could prove to be the better choice.

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*It's always best to modernise proactively rather than wait for something to break.*

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From a practical perspective, getting a clear picture of the needs of the business and how different solutions match up will take time, but the investment will be worthwhile. Working with the right suppliers can help here, especially manufacturers and resellers that offer a wide range of solutions and who have no axe to grind on whether to advise you down one route or another.

## Conclusion

In summary, the common perceived need for dedicated solutions is probably the result of a lack of knowledge of the functionality available in many new multi-function systems. There is no doubt that dedicated single purpose solutions have their place, but for most SMBs it is probably as an exception rather than being the rule. The net takeaway is do your homework and/or work with knowledgeable broad-portfolio suppliers/resellers who can provide advice to help define your requirements and help you to determine the best way to modernise your capabilities.

In the meantime, don't let lack of knowledge or uncertainty hold you back. The pressures on your network will only get greater over time, and it's always best to modernise proactively rather than wait for something to break.

## References

The following research report is available for free download from the Freeform Dynamics website ([www.freeformdynamics.com](http://www.freeformdynamics.com)).

1. Future Proofing your Network

## About Freeform Dynamics

Freeform Dynamics is an IT industry analyst firm. Through our research and insights, we aim to help busy IT and business professionals get up to speed on the latest technology developments, and make better informed investment decisions.

For more information, and access to our library of free research, please visit [www.freeformdynamics.com](http://www.freeformdynamics.com).

## About Barracuda Networks, Inc. (NYSE: CUDA)

Barracuda provides cloud-connected security and storage solutions that simplify IT. These powerful, easy-to use and affordable solutions are trusted by more than 150,000 organizations worldwide and are delivered in appliance, virtual appliance, cloud and hybrid deployments. Barracuda's customer-centric business model focuses on delivering high-value, subscription-based IT solutions that provide end-to-end network and data security.

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