Managed services HELP local governments MEET evolving cybersecurity threats

BIO

Michael Esolda
CIO, Woodbridge Township Municipal Government and School District

Michael D. Esolda is starting his 31st year as a public servant for Woodbridge Township Municipal Government/Police and Woodbridge Township School District. Currently Michael is the Chief Information Officer for all three entities.

Starting out as a programmer/analyst and technology project manager, Michael is familiar with a wide range of hardware, software, networking, telecommunications, and client/server technologies, specifically relating to E-Government and E-School initiatives.

Michael served as Senior Staff Advisor for Governor McGreevey's Transition Team for Information Technology and serves on various local, state and county technology committees. Memberships currently include: Middlesex County Educational Technical Training Center (ETTC), Middlesex County Information Resource Management Commission, State of New Jersey Digital Government Advisory Board, Woodbridge Township Public

Safety Commission, Woodbridge Township Cable Commission/Sewer Utility Review Board and numerous volunteer community committees. In December 2003 Michael was elected President of the New Jersey Government Management Information Sciences (NJ-GMIS), a world-wide technology organization. He continues to serve as a board member of the NJ-GMIS Foundation. In 2016 Michael became a Rutgers University adjunct professor teaching technology for the State of New Jersey Certified Public Manager Program.

Michael holds several degrees: Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Seton Hall University; Master of Science in Computer Science at New Jersey Institute of Technology; candidate for Ph.D. in Management at Rutgers Newark and is a State of New Jersey Certified Public Supervisor and Manager and graduate of the University of North Carolina's Chief Information Officer Certification Program.

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ocal government IT organizations – whether they're in education, municipal services, or a police or fire department – all face a common challenge. They're being tasked to provide more IT services with the same, or fewer, resources as they've had in the past. Governments want more WiFi access for residents and better-connected libraries and schools, but they don't have significant additional budget to support these expanded services securely.

"Local governments almost never have a dedicated person for security," says Steve Struthers DynTek's VP of Security Services. "Even the largest of them often don't have enough full time security resources. They need managed services that let them roll these additional resources as needed, without breaking their budgets."

Michael Esolda is the CIO for Woodbridge Township Municipal Government and School District in Woodbridge, N.J., the fifth largest municipality in the state. Esolda's IT team provides services to Woodbridge's schools, local government and public safety services – more than 60 buildings throughout the community – over a private fiber network. He estimates his group is responsible for securing approximately 20,000 devices, including a large Bring-Your-Own-Device (BYOD) population. Offering a shared service to three different sets of customers creates efficiencies and cost savings for Woodbridge, Esolda notes, but security is always a top priority for his team.

"We make sure we have the latest firewalls and patches in place," he says. "We also do external penetration testing as part of our regular maintenance budget. We essentially act as a cloud service for the local government, police, fire department and schools, so security is very important to us."

Esolda says his biggest challenges are budgeting; cybersecurity; and education – both for his own team and his municipal stakeholders. "Whenever there's new infrastructure going in, technology and security have to be an integral part of that discussion," he notes. "You need to be able to explain to a board member, superintendent or mayor why you need several thousand dollars to keep your network secure."

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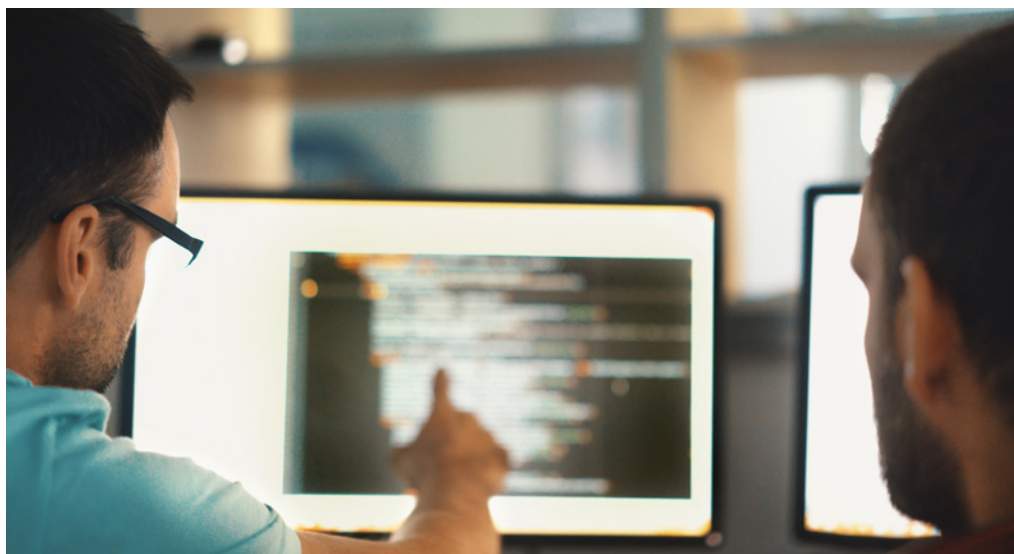
Even with the efficiencies offered by a shared services model, Esolda's team doesn't handle everything by themselves.

"In the public sector we always need to do more with less," he explains. "Our staff and budget isn't growing as quickly as our IT footprint. We work with other government groups and agencies to pool knowledge and learn from one another. We also bring in outside experts for expertise, especially around areas like security."

Although Woodbridge operates what is essentially a private network, Esolda and his team are looking to create more visibility into their network traffic, as the municipality looks to potentially leverage more cloud services.

"Having visibility is very important," he says. "We want to see what traffic is coming into our network and we want to be able to drill down. We want to be able to see a cybersecurity issue that's occurring at a particular building, or for example, even with a particular student's device and we can't afford to spend all day resolving the issue because it could bring our network down."

Information sharing between local governments plays an increasingly important role in helping them remain secure, says DynTek's Struthers.

"Groups like the Multi-State Information Sharing & Analysis Center (MS-ISAC) are publishing threat intelligence information that outlines the anatomy of different types of attacks found in the community," he explains. "That data is in machine-readable format. To truly take advantage of it, local governments need to get that machine-readable data into their systems, because if a cyberattack works on one municipality, there's a good chance the attackers will try the same thing on other local governments."

Finding out about attacks quickly and ensuring they won't happen to another local government, could be as simple as adding a rule to a firewall, Struthers adds.

In Woodbridge, Esolda and his team are planning to build a dashboard that gives them a better view of new and recent threats.

"Staying up to date with your security is more important than ever," he explains. "Technology is changing and there are more and more devices that have IP addresses. We need tools that make us more efficient and allow us to stay ahead of the threats like ransomware that we face."

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