CloudPassage: First Security/Compliance Assurance Solutions for the Elastic Cloud

On January 26th, CloudPassage emerged from stealth mode to announce the first products specifically designed to provide server vulnerability and firewall protection in highly virtualized, dynamic elastic Cloud computing environments. CloudPassage announced Halo™ SVM (Server Vulnerability Management) to automatically provide virtual server vulnerability management with the speed, consistency and scalability required for virtual servers. The Halo™ Firewall product will automatically and accurately manage and maintain consistent host-based firewall management in situations that are operational nightmares for traditional manual solutions.

CloudPassage

2735 Sand Hill Road
Menlo Park, CA 94025
USA

www.cloudpassage.com

info@cloudpassage.com

press@cloudpassage.com

(650) 989-1316 - Office

Initial releases of both products to secure an unlimited number of servers are available as free downloads from CloudPassage[1]. For-fee product upgrades with advanced features will be introduced over the coming months.

Background

Elastic Cloud computing provides rapid, inexpensive server infrastructure proliferation to allow Cloud-based applications for SaaS, social media, gaming, etc. in public cloud environments to scale up and down to meet demand. It allows rapid creation and reproduction of thousands of instances of virtual servers. Each instance includes all the vulnerabilities and exposures of the original implementation.

These virtual servers will often migrate and move across physical machine and cloud boundaries raising their risk profile. This rapid proliferation and dynamic migration makes them especially vulnerable to security problems.

Traditional perimeter-based firewall, IDS and IPS protection cannot migrate across physical server boundaries. Nor can protection from Nessus-like scanners focused on a group of servers in the traditional data center model. Manual attempts to maintain firewall protection with dynamic virtual server migrations pose an operational nightmare in terms of effort, implementation and configuration errors.

Security remains a paramount concern in Cloud-based environments. The issue becomes even more critical when handling business, health and financial records which are subject to rigid liability and confidentially mandates. Not only are there privacy concerns, but legal penalties and damage to reputation for data exposure can be disastrous.

[1] http://www.cloudpassage.com

While it is true that most liabilities and vulnerabilities can be addressed via operational best practices and proper management of updates, configurations and firewall policies, the fact is that existing management tools have not been designed to function in high volume, extremely dynamic virtual environments. It is for those environmental and operational conditions that CloudPassage has been uniquely designed to operate.

CloudPassage Halo products

CloudPassage has implemented their solution in modular fashion, separating functions to assure fast, reliable, scalable and automated security services with minimal overhead. Halo SVM provides real time awareness of security exposures and compliance violations. The Halo Daemon is the part of the architecture that resides on the customer's server. It gathers intelligence on the state of its host server. It reports to and acts on orders delivered from the Halo Grid for both the Halo SVM and Halo Firewall products. The remote Halo Grid determines and initiates any necessary remedial action on a server. Halo Grid policies and processes are managed and reports generated, in real-time, via the Halo Portal.

The Halo Firewall is architected in a complementary manner assigning virtual servers to groups with Firewall rules applied between groups. Group Firewall policies are created through a GUI to apply to a server group. Adding a new server triggers an automatic update for load balancing, etc. CloudPassage provides clear, detailed explanations of how this works on their website[2].

The Final Word

The announcement by CloudPassage couldn't be better timed. On the day CloudPassage emerged to announce their Cloud security solutions, TechWorld.com published an article, Digital black market offers cheap botnets for hire[3] reporting that for as little as $2 you can buy botnets to launch a spam campaign or purchase stolen credit card information; two of the security risk scenarios that the new products Halo SVM and Halo Firewall are specifically designed to protect against. It didn't hurt that two other vendors were also announcing security related GRC-related solutions in the same time frame.

There is no doubt security is a major issue in the Cloud. The development and management team at Cloud Passage demonstrate a clear understanding of Cloud security problems, as well as how to resolve them.

In our opinion, anyone working in an elastic Cloud environment will benefit from examining and using the CloudPassage Halo product offerings. The ability to use and evaluate their offering today with no risk or cost makes this a highly compelling product. We are already looking forward to their next product announcement.

[2] http://www.cloudpassage.com
[3] http://news.techworld.com/security/3258034/digital-black-market-offers-cheap-botnets-for-hire/?cmpid=TD1N8&no1x1&olo=daily%20newsletter

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About Ptak, Noel & Associates LLC

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www.ptaknoel.com

About the Author

Richard Ptak (rlptak@ptaknoel.com)

Rich has over 30 years' experience in systems product management working closely with Fortune 50 companies in developing product direction and strategies at a global level. Previously Ptak held positions as senior vice president at Hurwitz Group and D.H. Brown Associates. Earlier in his career he held engineering and marketing management positions with Western Electric's Electronic Switch Manufacturing Division and Digital Equipment Corporation. He is frequently quoted in major business and trade press. Ptak holds a master's in business administration from the University of Chicago and a master of science in engineering from Kansas State University.