Axpo – a Market Leader

The Axpo Group supplies electricity on a daily basis to a large section of the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Owned by the north-eastern canton, and serving as the canton’s own power supplier, the company has grown into Switzerland’s leading power supplier, with strong local roots and an international outlook.

The Axpo Group combines power production, transport networks, trade, sales and services under a single roof, within the Axpo Holding company. Around three million people and thousands of industrial and commercial businesses in north-east and central Switzerland obtain energy and energy-related services from the company. The organization’s presence in the European energy markets and energy exchanges is continually expanding. This is also true of its presence in the gas business, which is essential to international competitiveness.

IT Services Covering Thousands of Users

Axpo Informatik AG provides technical and commercial IT services for the group and its connected canton plants. Based in Baden, the IT firm employs over 130 employees and is represented by regional support organizations in Aarau, Beznau, Dietikon, Schaffhausen and Zurich. Currently, 3,200 users and approximately 500 applications in Switzerland and Europe are serviced from these locations.

Decision to Use USB Tokens for Authentication

To provide Axpo employees with mobile data access, the Group uses the VPN solutions Check Point Secure Clients and Citrix Access Gateway. These guarantee secure access to applications, protect the remote desktop, and help administrators enforce security guidelines for remote users.

Axpo Informatik AG had previously relied on different smartcards for the authentication and storage of digital certificates, but found that their hardware was not very stable. Another disadvantage was their laborious handling. For example, to block a user, his certificate had to be completely revoked; if the same user was later given remote access again, a completely new certificate was issued and then loaded onto the smartcard in another step.

To simplify the authentication processes and streamline the management of smartcards, Clounet AG, an IT service provider based near Bern, was brought in. They were commissioned to perform a market analysis, paying attention to the USB tokens, which also support OTP (one-time password) functions. In the end, solutions from Aladdin, as well as from several of its competitors, were compared. Of these, four, including the Aladdin eToken, were capable of fulfilling the mandatory and optional requirements specified in the study.

In addition to easy handling and management, these included interoperability with the existing infrastructure, stable hardware, and the possibility of providing different users with need-based solutions depending on their area of responsibility.

Evaluation and Implementation Process

One of the competitor solutions was already in trial use at Axpo, and the Group was also familiar with the authentication functions of another. The decision was thus made to also install the Aladdin eToken solution in the laboratory in order to obtain an overview of all possible products.

In addition to classic smartcard options, the eToken family from Aladdin includes solutions with a one-time password function and flash memory. These can be administered using a single management program and controlled for all token types using a client software version. Full integration into the existing Microsoft Active Directory Services is also possible.

Due to these advantages and based on the results of the comparison study by Clounet AG, Axpo Informatik AG ultimately decided on a test installation of the Aladdin solution. The full installation process in both the laboratory and the production environment was overseen by Internet Security AG Switzerland (ISAG). ISAG contributed significantly to eToken’s successful implementation, by, for example, quickly rectifying minor problems with the MS .NET framework during MS-ADS integration.

An installation for 30 production test users was gradually increased to 50 users. Upon reaching the final implementation stage, the new system will be available to a total of 500 users.

The project plan anticipated the gradual changeover of the smartcards used to date to Aladdin eTokens. In the long term, all users, both internal and remote, would need to be able to use the token type most suited to their specific task. Simple token management and streamlined token handling processes were a basic prerequisite for this.

Advantages of Aladdin eToken

The functional strengths of the eToken solution included the fact that OTP, smartcard and flash tokens could be managed using a common administration interface (the eToken TMS). Different types of tokens could be assigned and rolled out depending upon the responsibilities of the end-user. Existing technologies (such as Check Point and Citrix Access Gateway
• SSO Capabilities
• TMS Administration
• Scalability

Benefits:

- Service and Support to existing environment with no changes necessary to management of tokens easy, future stage same eToken platform at a could be added on to the assistance as necessary guidance and hands-on Aladdin reseller provided

- password token, using only the eToken credentials on the single users to store and access all

in this case) could be included without requiring major changes. Strategically, it was also crucial that new tokens need not be purchased after four years, as had been necessary with a competing solution. In addition, the IT services of Axpo Informatik AG could be broken down to different token types, enabling more specific pricing of services per user – another economic advantage.

“We opted for eToken from Aladdin as the hardware proved to be very stable,” said Franz Peter, Project Manager at Axpo Informatik AG. “In addition, different token types could be managed with a web-based, client-enabled management interface and operated using client software, the eToken RTE (Runtime Environment). The token management system was also fully MS-ADS-integrated.”

Satisfied End-Users and Project Managers

End-users reacted positively to both the operation and size of the eToken. The Check Point PKI managers also responded favorably, as the certificate process they had used until then (issue, renew, revoke) could not be transferred without adaptation.

With eToken, only OTP tokens were issued to external users. Full integration into MS ADS meant that there was no longer a need to maintain a second user database, also reducing the risk of inconsistent user databases.

Support from Internet Security AG on site, and later in remote mode, was always provided, from initial installation to productive operation. In the course of the large-scale eToken project, Clounet AG also became an Aladdin partner, ensuring continued support for Axpo Informatik AG. Two Clounet employees also obtained certifications as part of a Service Level Agreement between Axpo Informatik AG and Clounet. The training was provided at Internet Security AG, with two participating employees from Axpo Informatik AG.

Said Peter, “As a result of the excellent study carried out by Clounet AG, we were able to meet all of our token requirements with Aladdin products. Whether we require OTP or certificate-based authentication, the fully MS-ADS-integrated token management system from Aladdin provides reliable support, daily and without fail.”

About Axpo Holding Group

Axpo Holding Group includes Nordost Schweizerische Kraftwerke AG (NOK); Central Schweizerische Kraftwerke AG (CKW); and Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft Laufenburg AG (EGL).

About Axpo Informatik AG

Axpo Informatik AG has been providing technical and commercial IT services to the Axpo Group and its connected canton plants since 2001. Based in Baden, the IT firm has over 130 employees and is represented by regional support organizations in Aarau, Bexau, Dietikon, Schaffhausen and Zurich.

About Aladdin eToken

Aladdin eToken is a cost-effective user authentication and password management solution. It provides enhanced security and ensures safe information access; improved password and ID management; and secure mobility of digital credentials/certificates and keys.

About the size of an average house key, the award-winning Aladdin eToken is easy to use and highly portable, providing users with powerful authentication by requiring something they have, the tamper-proof eToken, and something they know, a password. It is used for secure network login, secure VPN, Web Sign-On, Simple Sign-On, secure email, and numerous other applications. eToken is available in smart card and USB form factors featuring physical access (RFID) capabilities and one-time password technology.

The Aladdin Token Management System (TMS) enables the deployment, provisioning and maintenance of security Tokens, Smartcards and ID Badges within an organization. In addition, TMS offers seamless, and reliable management for Enterprise security services combining both PKI and non-PKI systems.

For more information, visit: www.Aladdin.com/eToken.