

The Master Group Reduces Its Attack Surface by 80% With Illumio

Canada's largest HVAC-R distributor proactively reduces cyber risk with Zero Trust Segmentation

Business Goals

The Master Group has lived up to its name over the past 70 years, mastering the heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and refrigeration (HVAC-R) sector and becoming the largest independent distributor in Canada. It operates a network of 68 branches and an extensive product inventory from thousands of suppliers.

Executing distribution operations and the customer experience in an efficient manner underpins its success. And a network of thousands of IT assets supports this critical business objective.

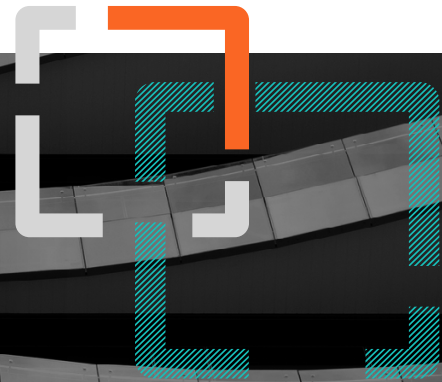
Director of Cybersecurity and Infrastructure, François Lepage, had the network well-covered when it comes to the security essentials, from data center firewalls to endpoint detection and response tools. But modern times have called for a Zero Trust strategy.

"In rethinking security from a Zero Trust perspective, we recognize that our strategy is only as good as our ability to withstand and limit the impact of inevitable breaches," says François Lepage.

Technology Challenge

Of particular concern to François was the threat of ransomware and its ability to move laterally (or "east-west") between servers.

To protect The Master Group's business-critical applications against the spread of ransomware, François needed to understand the potential pathways




Master

Industry: HVAC-R Distributor

Location: Canada

Challenge: Limited visibility and Zero Trust protection needed to reduce risk from ransomware and lateral movement threats

Solution: [Illumio Core](#)

Use cases: High-Value Asset Protection, Ransomware Protection

Benefits:

- 80% reduction in exploitable attack surface
- Immediate value from real-time visibility into unnecessary connections
- Efficient enforcement with zero disruption or downtime

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François Lepage
Director of Cybersecurity
and Infrastructure

open to attacks on the distributor's network. He didn't have the resources to spend hours scouring firewall logs to try to figure out unnecessary connections or to set up firewall GPOs (Group Policy Objects) to control those connections.

With Zero Trust as its "North Star" strategy, The Master Group started looking for microsegmentation technology to address these challenges.

After considering segmentation solutions from a couple of networking giants that would be too complicated to implement and manage, François set out to find the best host-based approach.

"I was looking for a solution that did the one thing I needed very well, very easily and reliably," recalls François Lepage. "Microsegmentation technology had to be the company's core focus, where segmentation functionality couldn't be adversely affected by upsells like deception technology."

How Illumio Helped

A proof of concept of Illumio Core revealed superior ease of use and a unique foundation for success. "Not only did we see that the product would hit the mark on our technical and operational needs, but I truly felt the Illumio team would be there for me every step of the way," François Lepage says.

This experience gave François the confidence to roll out Illumio Zero Trust Segmentation.

It is a "new way of thinking for someone coming from the firewall world," according to François Lepage. But he loves the thoughtful process he's taking for setting up the labels with which rules are defined, seeing and understanding server communications, and ultimately enforcing Zero Trust Segmentation controls.

"Illumio is one of the top two most important security projects for Master," says François Lepage. "It provides powerful assurance that we can limit the impact of a breach and has been so easy to implement and manage. The value is incomparable."

Results & Benefits

The Master Group has learned that Illumio Core delivers exactly as advertised.

The application dependency map helped François identify 10 unused open ports in a development environment — a critical discovery.

"We had no way of seeing unnecessary connections before Illumio," says François Lepage. "And now, with a few clicks, we can close highly connected ports and eliminate a potentially huge source of ransomware risk."

François predicts great returns in risk reduction: "By blocking and eliminating server-to-server threats, Illumio will reduce our attack surface by at least 80%."

Illumio has also lived up to The Master Group's expectations for operational sustainability and efficiency. While attempting segmentation with firewalls would have taken several years to implement and several headcounts to manage, Illumio Core requires only 30 minutes per week to enforce segmentation rules. Illumio's agent has proven to be lightweight and reliable. The Master Group has not experienced a single issue or any downtime.

As The Master Group continues to build its Zero Trust posture, the business has found a trusted and indispensable partner in Illumio.

"Illumio keeps my life simple and secure," says François Lepage. "It's a necessity."

About Illumio



Illumio, the Zero Trust Segmentation Company, stops breaches from spreading across the hybrid attack surface. The Illumio ZTS Platform visualizes all traffic flows between workloads, devices, and the internet, automatically sets granular segmentation policies to control communications, and isolates high-value assets and compromised systems proactively or in response to active attacks. Illumio protects organizations of all sizes, from Fortune 100 to small business, by stopping breaches and ransomware in minutes, saving millions of dollars in application downtime, and accelerating cloud and digital transformation projects.