WHITEPAPER
CYBERSECURITY

How the Zero Trust Security Model Can Protect the Enterprise Infrastructure from Cyber Threats

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INTRODUCTION

Modern enterprise infrastructure is increasingly complex, operating several internal networks, remote offices with their own local infrastructure, remote and/or mobile individuals, and subscribing cloud and SaaS services. This complexity has outstripped legacy methods of perimeter-based network security as there is no single, easily identified perimeter for the enterprise. Perimeter-based network security has also been shown to be insufficient since once attackers breach the outer perimeter, further lateral movement is fairly easy and unhindered.

This begs the question, ***"Are traditional cybersecurity models enough to tackle the increasing cybersecurity challenges and complexity?"*** The simple answer is **NO.**

Traditional security is not sufficient to address these evolving challenges. A paradigm shift in cybersecurity approaches has emerged, leading to the rise of the **'Zero Trust'** security model. Zero Trust is primarily focused on data and service protection but can be (and should be) expanded to include all enterprise assets (devices, infrastructure components, applications, virtual and cloud components) and subjects (end users, applications and other non-human entities that request information from resources).

This whitepaper aims to explore the evolving Cybersecurity challenges and how the Zero Trust Architecture addresses these new-age cyberthreats. We'll further understand how Black Box's experienced consultants can step in and take charge of implementing the Zero Trust model for your organization.

Let's deep dive and start with first understanding the traditional cybersecurity practice and the challenges associated with it.

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"Did you know

Zero Trust reduces the cost of a data breach by about

$1 million?"

Traditional Cybersecurity – It's No More Enough

Traditional cybersecurity primarily focuses on securing the organization's network perimeter (or boundary) and relies on trust if the resource is within the network. It involves implementing security measures such as firewalls, intrusion detection systems, and virtual private networks (VPNs) to protect the network from external threats. However, with the rise of cloud computing, mobile devices, remote work, and interconnected systems, the traditional network perimeter has dissolved. Organizations now have a distributed and decentralized IT infrastructure that extends beyond the traditional boundaries.

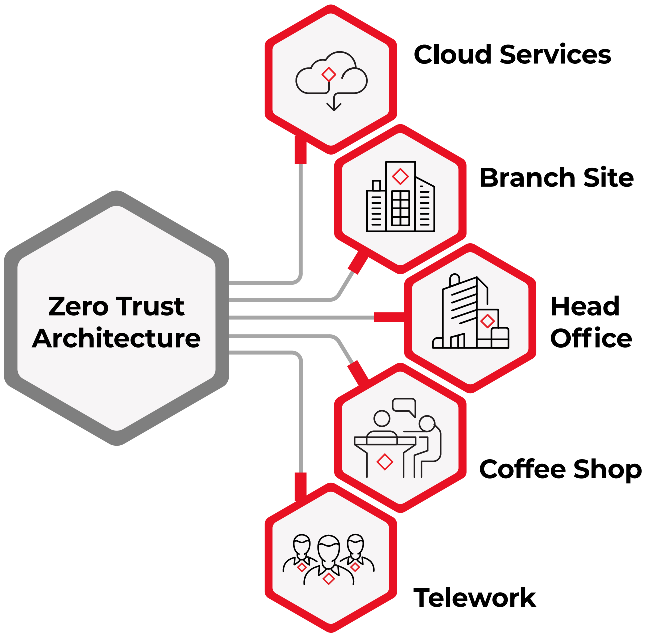
Rise of Cloud:
With the rapid adoption of digital transformation, organizations have switched over to Cloud infrastructure and services. This means that the data and information now aren't limited to local networks and on-premise. The boundaries of the network have become blurred as resources and data are stored and accessed from multiple Cloud environments, including public, private, and hybrid Clouds. This has introduced additional points of vulnerability that extend beyond the traditional network perimeter. Traditional security measures cannot fully protect against threats originating from external connections.

Remote Work:
Remote work has necessitated that employees access corporate resources from various locations, often using personal devices and unsecured networks. This expansion of the network surface creates more entry points for cybercriminals to target and exploit vulnerabilities in the network perimeter.

81.4% of SME IT professionals agreed that remote work increased their focus on security.

When the boundaries are dissolving fast and the complexity of cyberthreats is increasing, the most viable security option seems to be ***"trust no one, verify everything."*** Zero trust security models assume that an attacker is present in the environment and that an enterprise-owned environment is no different or no more trustworthy than any non-enterprise-owned environment.

Moving forward, we will shed more light on what is Zero Trust Security and how it has become the much-needed defense against cyberattacks in today's modernized environments in which most organizations operate.



Zero Trust Security Model- Need of the Hour

What is Zero Trust Security Model?

Trust no one and thou shall be safe.

This philosophy has saved many from losses, and it broadly reflects the concept on which the Zero Trust Model is based.

Traditional security model **"trusts"** anyone who is within an organization's perimeter, a Zero Trust environment literally places **'zero'** trust in external or internal users. Instead, it relies on continuous authentication, authorization, and verification of all users, devices, and network components. The core aspect of this model is NEVER **"trust"** any user, device, and/or network component inside or outside the organization.

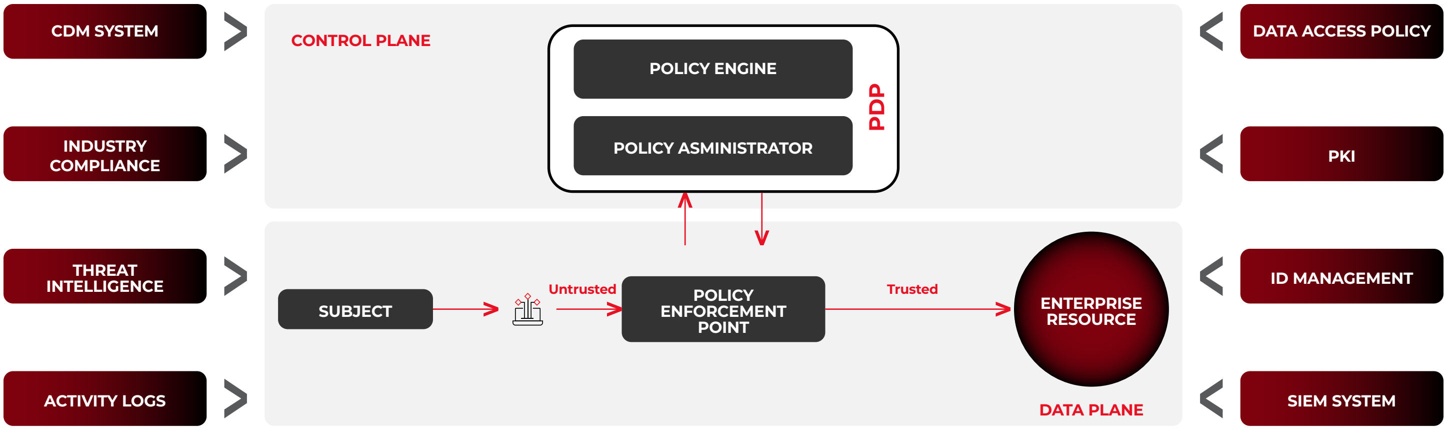
Zero Trust is a cybersecurity paradigm focused on resource protection and the premise that trust is never granted implicitly but must be continually evaluated. Zero trust architecture is an end-to-end approach to enterprise resource and data security that encompasses identity (person and non-person entities), credentials, access management, operations, endpoints, hosting environments, and the interconnecting infrastructure.

Zero Trust Architecture (ZTA) is an enterprise cybersecurity architecture that is based on zero trust principles and designed to prevent data breaches and limit internal lateral movement. Let us discuss ZTA, its logical components, possible deployment scenarios, and threats. Let us also look at a general road map for organizations wishing to migrate to a zero-trust design approach and discuss relevant policies that may impact or influence a zero-trust architecture.

The Zero Trust Model focuses on detecting and mitigating threats in real time, employing advanced technologies such as behavioral analytics, threat intelligence, and machine learning to identify anomalies and potential security breaches.

Key Components of Zero Trust Architecture (ZTA)

The Zero Trust Architecture is not a single architecture but a set of guiding principles for workflow, system design and operations that can be used to improve the security posture of any classification or sensitivity level. Transitioning to ZTA is a journey concerning how an organization evaluates risk in its mission and cannot simply be accomplished with a wholesale replacement of technology.



Zero Trust Architecture Components

Policy Engine (PE) is responsible for the ultimate decision to grant access to a resource for a given subject. PE uses enterprise policy as well as input from external sources as input to a trust algorithm to grant, deny, or revoke access to the resource. The PE is paired with the policy administrator component. The policy engine makes and logs the decision (as approved, or denied), and the policy administrator executes the decision.

Policy Administrator (PA) is responsible for establishing and/or shutting down the communication path between a subject and a resource. It would generate any session-specific authentication and authentication token or credential used by a client to access an enterprise resource. It is closely tied to the PE and relies on its decision to ultimately allow or deny a session. If the session is authorized and the request authenticated, the PA configures the PEP to allow the session to start. If the session is denied the PA signals to the PEP to shut down the connection.

Policy Enforcement Point (PEP) is responsible for enabling, monitoring, and eventually terminating connections between a subject and an enterprise resource. The PEP communicates with the PA to forward requests and/or receive policy updates from the PA. This is a single logical component in ZTA but may be broken into two different components: the client and resource side or a single portal component that acts as a gatekeeper for communication paths.

The following technologies are key to implementing Zero Trust Architecture (ZTA).

Identity and Access Management (IAM):

This is the fundamental building block of the Zero Trust framework. The purpose here is to establish strong identity verification and access controls for users, devices, and applications to securely manage and control user identities and their access to resources within an organization’s infrastructure.

IAM in the Zero Trust model goes beyond traditional username and password-based authentication. It incorporates multifactor authentication (MFA), which requires users to provide additional verification factors, such as biometrics, smart cards, or one-time passwords, to prove their identity. This multi-layered approach significantly enhances security and reduces the risk of unauthorized access.

Moreover, IAM relies on the principle of least privilege, thereby enabling granular access control and limiting the potential impact of security breaches. IAM also includes features like identity lifecycle management, which ensures that user access privileges are regularly reviewed, updated, and revoked when necessary. This helps maintain the principle of continuous monitoring and ensures that access rights are aligned with changing roles and responsibilities within the organization.

Network Segmentation and Micro-segmentation:

Network segmentation is the division of the network into smaller, isolated segments, thereby enhancing security by applying granular access controls to each segment. Micro-segmentation takes network segmentation a step further by implementing fine-grained access controls at the individual workload or application level. Instead of applying broad access policies to entire segments, micro-segmentation allows organizations to define specific access rules for each workload or application within a segment.

Continuous Monitoring & Analytics:

Continuous monitoring and analytics are needed to detect anomalies and potential security breaches in real-time. In a Zero Trust model, this is achieved by analyzing network traffic, user behavior, and device posture to identify any deviations from normal patterns. Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) tools, log analysis, and behavior analytics solutions are commonly used for this purpose.

Zero Trust Policies and Enforcement Mechanisms:

Zero Trust policies define the rules and criteria for granting or denying access to resources. These policies are enforced through technologies such as network firewalls, web application firewalls (WAFs), and secure web gateways. Policies can be based on various factors, including user identity, device health, location, and the sensitivity of the requested resource.

Data Protection and Encryption:

Zero Trust emphasizes the need to protect data both at rest and in transit. Encryption techniques, such as Transport Layer Security (TLS) and Secure Sockets Layer (SSL), are used to secure data communications. Additionally, data loss prevention (DLP) solutions and encryption at the file or database level help protect sensitive information.

Automation and Orchestration:

Automation and orchestration play a critical role in Zero Trust environments. Automated processes help streamline security operations, reduce human errors, and ensure consistent enforcement of security policies. Orchestration tools enable the integration and coordination of various security components and technologies, creating a unified and efficient security ecosystem.

User Behavior Analytics (UBA):

UBA solutions analyze user behavior and build behavioral profiles to identify deviations or suspicious activities. By monitoring user interactions with resources and detecting anomalies, UBA helps detect insider threats, compromised accounts, and unauthorized access attempts.

Secure Access Gateways:

Secure access gateways, such as virtual private networks (VPNs) and secure web gateways, provide secure remote access to resources while enforcing Zero Trust policies. These gateways authenticate users and devices, encrypt traffic, and apply access controls based on policy enforcement rules.

Benefits of a Zero Trust Model

By adopting the Zero Trust Security Model, organizations can enhance their security posture, protect critical assets, and mitigate the risks associated with evolving cyberthreats, remote work, cloud services, and the dynamic nature of modern network environments.

The following are the benefits which accrue to an organization following the **"Zero Trust"** dictum of **"NEVER TRUST, ALWAYS VERIFY";**

Security Benefits

Reduced Attack Surface: By limiting access to resources and enforcing least-privilege principles, zero trust minimizes the points where attackers can compromise systems.

Protection Against Insider Threats: By continuous verification and strict access controls, zero trust prevents malicious or accidental harm by unauthorized insiders.

Stronger Defense Against Credential Theft: Zero trust reduces impact of phishing attacks and stolen passwords by requiring constant re-authentication and multi-factor authentication.

Improved Breach Containment: Micro-segmentation and identity-based segmentation isolate network sections, limiting an attacker's movement and the potential damage from a successful breach.

Compliance and Management Benefits

Improved Compliance: zero trust leverages robust data and user access controls to meet numerous data protection and privacy regulations.

Centralized Monitoring and Control: Zero trust offers centralized tools for monitoring network traffic and user activity, streamlining security management and incident response.

Operational Benefits

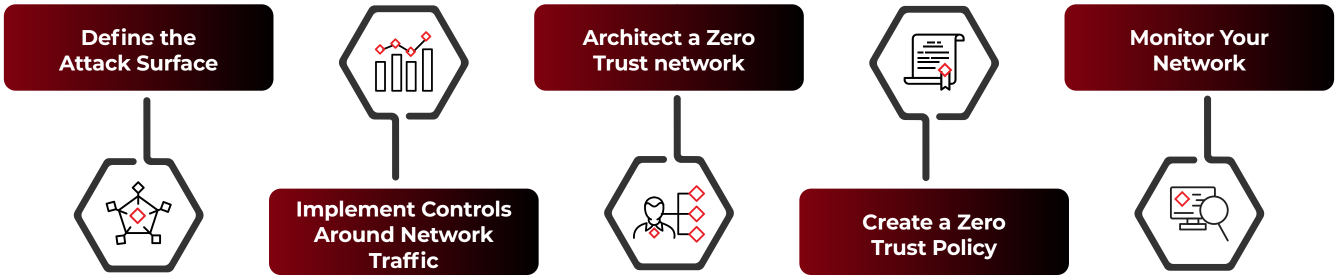
Enhanced Network Visibility: Zero trust provides greater transparency into user activities and network behavior, resulting in swift detection of threats.

Greater Flexibility for Remote Work: Zero trust securely enables remote workers and BYOD policies with secure access to resources from any location even without VPNs.

Secure Cloud Environment Management: Zero trust enforces access controls based on identity, protecting resources regardless of location or changes in infrastructure for cloud-based and multi-cloud environments.

Implementing Zero Trust in Enterprise Infrastructure

The implementation of a Zero Trust Architecture is a journey and should not be seen as a complete replacement of one's existing infrastructure and processes. One should first develop a strategy and select an appropriate tactical framework. Next define use cases, right size the scope, estimate effort and build a communication plan.


Define the Attack Surface
Implement Controls Around Network Traffic
Architect a Zero Trust network
Create a Zero Trust Policy
Monitor Your Network

Zero Trust Implementation Roadmap

Define the Attack Surface (Asset discovery and Prioritization)

The Zero Trust security model protects your most sensitive assets by controlling access and verifying all transactions. First identify these assets, prioritize them and focus on your most valuable digital assets. Your most critical and sensitive data typically resides on resources within your private data center or public cloud, you typically should start your Zero Trust focusing on these. The following are four major attack surfaces.

Sensitive Data: Customers and employee's data, as well as company proprietary information. Ex: Payment Card Information (PCI), Protected Health Information (PHI), Personally Identifiable Information (PII), and Intellectual Property (IP)

Critical Applications: Applications that play a central role in your most crucial business processes. Ex: Custom software, ERP, Financial systems, HRMS.

Physical Assets: These can range from Point-of-Sale (PoS) terminals to Internet-of-Things (IoT) devices to Network devices to Manufacturing equipment.

Corporate Services: These include elements of your infrastructure used to support the day-to-day work of users, as well as those used by customers for sales and other interactions. Ex: Payroll, Time management, Identity Management, CRM, ITSM.

One should perform a thorough assessment of existing infrastructure to identify vulnerabilities and potential points of attack. This includes evaluating network architecture, access controls, authentication mechanisms, and security policies.

Implement controls around data traffic (Map and Verify)

To apply Zero Trust most effectively, one should understand application flows within an organization both within one's network as well as outside to the cloud. The way traffic flows through a network depends on systems being used, the data, its access and the location where this data is located.

Data access requests do not just simply "go to these systems";, they need to be routed through access control processes/systems, understanding these by scanning and mapping transactions flows within one's environment will help decide on access controls to be implemented.

When implementing these access controls, one should consider the following to help establish least privileged policies:

Which applications have access to critical data.

Which users have access to those applications.

Which users and applications have access to which infrastructures.

Architect a Zero Trust Network

A Zero Trust network is designed around your specific attack surface to protect. Typically, architecture may begin with segmenting your network, designing a next-generation firewall (NGFW), implementing an Identify and Access management (IAM) system with multi-factor authentication (MFA) to ensure users are thoroughly vetted before being granted access.

There are a variety of options to provide Zero Trust capabilities by location;

Central sites within the enterprise: Here IT departments face many challenges with infrastructure management, visibility, and security. This is due to the increased number of IoT devices, wireless networks, BYOD devices, and multi-floor and multi-building connected networks, as well as increased demand for internet, data center, public cloud, and SaaS access. Protecting data, applications, devices, and users is paramount. NGFWs can secure the network environment, protecting key assets, providing enhanced visibility and threat protections that secure all east-west and north-south traffic flows.

Remote sites: These locations need access to applications that might be in the data center, in the cloud, or through SaaS providers. One can secure connectivity with SD-WAN, SASE/SSE platforms or with an on-premises NGFW.

Mobile Users: One can extend NGFW services to mobile users while providing secure access to applications in the data center, in the cloud, and through SaaS providers.

Data center and private cloud: One can leverage NGFW to deploy applications rapidly with consistent protection, and protect data and applications residing in the data center. One can leverage NGFW to provide inline security and threat protection across multiple environments (like KVM, OpenStack, VMware, and Nutanix) on a private cloud.

Public cloud: One can leverage NGFW to reduce the attack surface and secure both north-south and east-west traffic flows. They provide comprehensive visibility and control across multiple cloud providers (like AWS, Azure, Google Cloud, and Oracle Cloud Infrastructure).

Create a Zero Trust policy: After architecting the network, the next step is to design Zero Trust policies leveraging standard processes like the “Kipling Method”. This involves asking who, what, when, where, why, and how for every user, device, and network that wants to gain access.

Implementation and Migration: Once the roadmap is prepared, consider factors such as scalability, compatibility with existing systems, and the overall impact on user experience for implementation. It must align with your organization’s business requirements and compliance obligations.

Monitor the network: Monitoring activity on the network can generate alerts to potential issues sooner and provide valuable insights for optimizing network performance without compromising security. Key tools for monitoring are reports, analytics and system logs analysis.

Regular Testing and Auditing: Once implementation is complete, continuous testing and auditing of the Zero Trust infrastructure are critical to identifying vulnerabilities or gaps. Cybersecurity experts conduct penetration testing, vulnerability assessments, and security audits to ensure ongoing compliance and effectiveness of your security measures.

How We can help:

Black Box delivers best-in-class cybersecurity solutions and services at the speed of innovation, empowering clients to achieve their business goals securely. With multiple global Security Operations Centers (SOCs) and Security Delivery Centers, we drive digital transformation through full lifecycle, outcome-based, and customizable cybersecurity services. These include advisory, system integration, and end-to-end managed security solutions tailored to meet diverse client needs.

Working cohesively, our go-to-market and service delivery teams ensure seamless execution of security solutions across 30+ countries. At Black Box, excellence is embedded in our DNA. We are committed to building strong partnerships by delivering unparalleled cybersecurity solutions, responsive support, and unwavering dedication to client security. As we embrace the opportunities of the digital era, we invite you to join us in securing the future.

Conclusion:

Technology is evolving fast, and so are the associated threats. While historically, perimeter security might've successfully fenced organizations against potential cyberthreats, the model is no more reliable.

Today, **"trust"** has become a cliched word and cybercriminals know it very well. No resource can be trusted, be it external or internal. Hence, the Zero Trust Model is the present and the future of cybersecurity, and the sooner organizations realize this, the better they will be guarded against cyberattacks.

About the Author:

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Shrini is a seasoned cybersecurity leader with over 25 years of experience driving large-scale security transformations and advising Fortune 500 organizations. Renowned for aligning cybersecurity strategy with business goals, he has built and scaled high-performing security practices focused on innovation, operational resilience, and client success.

A trusted advisor to CISOs and CIOs, Shrini is passionateaboutdevelopingtop-tiercybersecurity talent and fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. In his current role at Black Box, he leads the expansion of the company's cybersecurity footprint, strengthens solution offerings, and partners closely with sales and delivery teams to deliver business-aligned, outcome-driven security solutions. His leadership is instrumental in positioning Black Box as a trusted global cybersecurity partner.

Abbreviations:

- **BYOD:** Bring-Your-Own-Device
- **CASB:** Cloud Access Security Broker
- **CRM:** Customer Relationship Management
- **FWaaS:** Firewall as a Service
- **IAM:** Identity and Access Management
- **IT:** Information Technology
- **ITSM:** Information Technology Service Management
- **IP:** Intellectual Property
- **IoT:** Internet of Things
- **NGFW:** Next Generation Firewall
- **PCI:** Payment Card Information
- **PA:** Policy Administrator
- **PE:** Policy Engine
- **PEP:** Policy Enforcement Point
- **PHI:** Protected Health Information
- **PII:** Personally Identifiable Information
- **PoS:** Point-of-Sale
- **SASE:** Secure Access Service Edge
- **SIEM:** Security Information and Event Management
- **SME:** Subject Matter Expert
- **SSE:** Security Service Edge
- **SWG:** Secure Web Gateway
- **VPN:** Virtual Private Networks
- **ZT:** Zero Trust
- **ZTA:** Zero Trust Architecture
- **ZTNA:** Zero Trust Network Access

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Black Box is a global leader in digital infrastructure solutions, delivering network and system integration, managed services, and technology products to Fortune 100 and top global enterprises. With a presence across the United States, Europe, India, Asia Pacific, the Middle East, and Latin America, Black Box serves businesses across financial services, technology, healthcare, retail, public services, and manufacturing.