



SecureIQlab[®]

REPORT

CyberRisk Validation Report – Palo Alto Networks

Product Version: Palo Alto Networks Cloud Firewall Solution

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1. Introduction

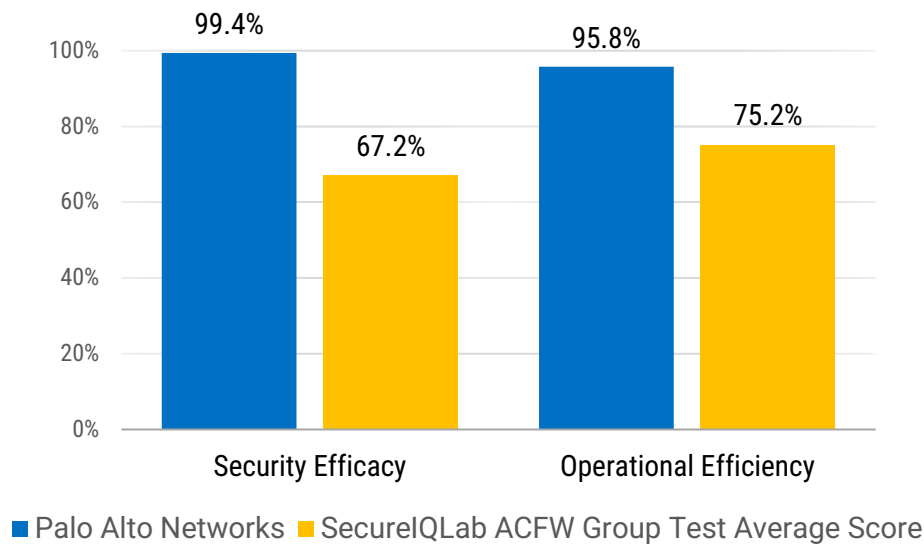


Figure 1. Summary results for Palo Alto Networks vs the ACFW Group Test Scores

Advanced Cloud Firewalls (ACFW) protect the infrastructure that organizations depend on. These firewalls serve as a virtual shield. ACFWs use a proactive approach and are designed to simplify security.

SecureQLab conducted testing for 12¹ leading enterprise-class ACFW solutions. This test was conducted in accordance with the Anti-Malware Testing Standards Organization² (AMTSO) test Standard. The maps to version v1.6 of the SecureQLab Advanced Cloud Firewall CyberRisk Validation Methodology, AMTSO Test ID: AMTSO-LS1-TP070. It is the most comprehensive evaluation of its kind ever performed.

As part of this test, SecureQLab completed testing Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall. This report discusses the test results for the Palo Alto Networks PAYG VM-Series Virtual NextGen Firewall with Advanced Security Subs, 24x7 Support' AMI in AWS, PAN-OS version 11.0.2-h2, and includes validation of the following security modules and components: Advanced Threat Prevention (Vulnerability Protection, Anti-Spyware, Antivirus/ML-AV) and Advanced URL Filtering with inline cloud analysis features, Wildfire, and DNS Security.

This report offers empirical data points on what to expect from the Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall, highlighting features and business considerations. SecureQLab's testing showcases the overall organizational value of the Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall in security effectiveness and operational efficiency. Figure 1 highlights Palo Alto Networks' results in these two areas versus the group test averages.

As Figure 1 shows visually, Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall was superior to the average ACFW tested.

In writing this report, SecureQLab has made extensive efforts to guarantee the accuracy of the results while straightforwardly presenting them. However, the test results are necessarily simplified to be presented for review in a summary format.

¹ Testing was attempted on a total of 12 Advanced Cloud Firewall solutions. Please [click here](#) for details.

² standards <https://www.amtso.org/conducted-testing>.

2. Report Summary

This 2024 Advanced Cloud Firewall CyberRisk Validation Report provides test results for the Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall. Table 1 summarizes the product's overall validation results around security effectiveness, resistance to false positives, operational efficiency, and SSL/TLS security efficacy of the Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall solution validated against SecureQLab ACFW v1.6 Methodology³.

ACFW Test Categories	Palo Alto Networks ACFW Score	SecureQLab ACFW Group Test Average Score
Security Efficacy	99.4%	67.2%
Resistance to False Positives	100.0%	89.8%
Operational Efficiency	95.8%	75.2%
SSL/TLS Security Efficacy	100.0%	68.4%

Table 1. Palo Alto Networks ACFW Result Summary

Figure 2 presents the above table in visual format.

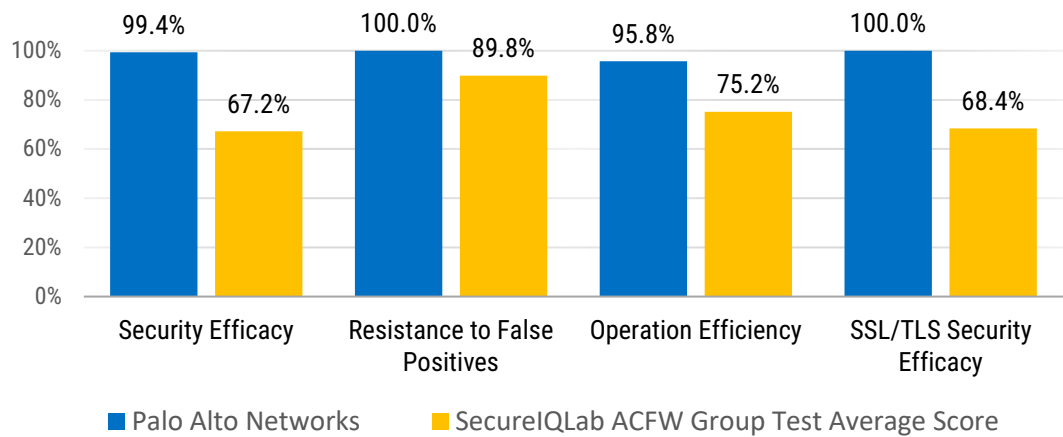


Figure 2. Overall Result Summary: Palo Alto Networks ACFW vs SecureQLab ACFW Group Test Average

Overall Result Summary: The Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall did exceptionally well compared to the overall SecureQLab ACFW group test average in all the primary enterprise categories as represented in the SecureQLab ACFW validation methodology selection criteria.

³ [SecureQLab ACFW v1.6 Methodology](#)

3. ACFW Test Overview

Advanced Cloud Firewalls (ACFWs) must effectively counter the emergence of advanced attack vectors, novel strategies, and new attack surfaces, thwarting threats that are complex and customized. Beyond merely being aware of application use of the internet, they should possess capabilities to inspect packet content and search for Indicators of Attack (IOA) within the data stream. This test was designed to confirm how well the tested ACFW was able to:

- Identify permitted applications and block prohibited applications.
- Identify and block threats attempting to use “known good” ports and protocols.
- Identify and block threats that attempt evasive tactics, such as non-standard ports or “port hopping.”
- Identify and block threats encrypted with SSL/TLS.
- Identify users, groups, and locations, and apply policy regardless of I.P. address.
- Identify and block outbound data leaks.
- Identify and block outbound Botnet Command and Control communications.
- Enable secure business workflow with a high detection rate and low Signal-to-Noise ratio.
- Provide global visibility and granular policy management.
- Provide all necessary alerts and configuration recommendations based on best practices.

SecureQLab defines prevention as a 24/7 automated response offering without human intervention. This can be achieved through various technologies and mechanisms, including signature-based models, policy-based models, behavior-based models, and machine learning (ML) or artificial intelligence (AI)-based models. This definition is technology-agnostic, focusing on outcomes of the various analyst workflows and scenarios rather than the specific prevention technology. ACFWs, when deployed in a stand-alone mode, are expected to prevent both initial and ongoing attacks while also providing robust reporting capabilities.

The SecureQLab ACFW v1.6 validation methodology was tailored towards the prevention and reporting capabilities for security and compliance. Configurations typically included multiple security and compliance applications such as Vulnerability Protection, Anti-Spyware, Antivirus, URL Filtering, and DNS Security. By default, when configuring, “detect” settings were set to “protect” or “block”. SecureQLab then performed any required tuning according to recommended vendor best practices for operational scenarios involving cloud deployments⁴.

3.1 ACFW Deployment Overview

Per SecureQLab's methodology, all ACFW vendors were requested to configure their products based on best practices that enterprises should implement when deploying the firewall in their organizations. The intent of this testing methodology is to mirror a successful customer experience during the deployment and management of the product.

During the evaluation, SecureQLab ensured product updates and configuration changes were executed through a central management console: cloud or on-prem device portal. This approach aimed to cover all test scenarios from start to finish to the greatest extent possible.

⁴ [Palo Alto Networks deployment reference.](#)

For a more comprehensive understanding of our testing methods, refer to version 1.6 of the SecureQLab 2023 [ACFW CyberRisk Validation Methodology](#) (AMTSO Test ID: AMTSO-LS1-TP070).

4. Security Efficacy Results

Advanced Cloud Firewalls should be designed to protect cloud-based resources and applications, shielding them from unauthorized access and prevalent cyber threats.

Each ACFW solution evaluated in this test underwent scrutiny across multiple distinct enterprise-centric categories, involving attack vectors of more than 1000 real-world operational scenarios. These scenarios used real world attacks that have targeted small-to-medium size businesses, enterprises, and other organizations. The comprehensive testing performed by SecureQLab reflects our commitment to innovation and continuous improvement. Moving forward, SecureQLab plans to continue to augment attack libraries and incorporate additional relevant operational metrics as needed in future iterations of this test.

The Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall was tested against 13 attack types within four primary standard threat categories. Table 2 below presents the results of these tests. Figure 3 below presents an overview of the SecureQLab findings during the security effectiveness validation and reporting of the Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall. This includes the standard threat category score, the advanced threat category score, the operational accuracy, and the SSL/TLS threat efficacy score from the methodology. These sections of the methodology were selected for presentation because these sections tested each ACFW against the four primary standard threat categories.

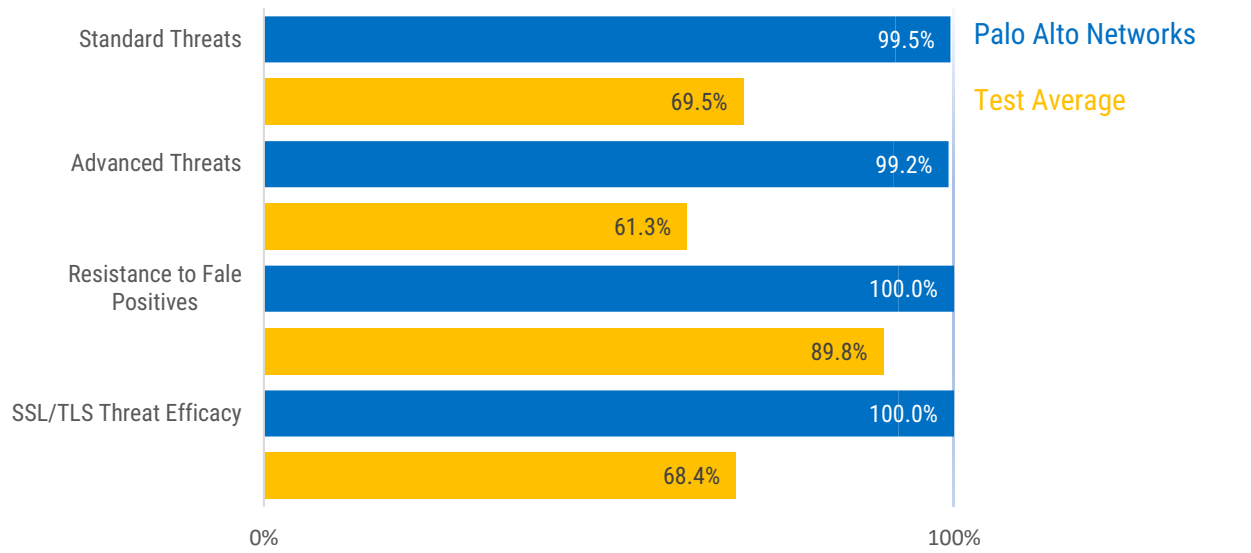


Figure 3. Palo Alto Networks Advanced Cloud Firewall Security Effectiveness

4.1 Common Cloud Firewall Threat Categories (Standard Threats)

The Common Cloud Firewall Threat (Standard Threats) average scores are calculated by averaging the scores for each threat type together within their respective attack category.

Standard Threat Types	Palo Alto Networks ACFW Inspection Score	SecureQLab ACFW Group Test Average Score
Application-Based Threats		
Cross-Site Scripting (XSS) Attacks – HTTP	100.0%	75.5%
Cross-Site Scripting (XSS) Attacks – HTTPS	100.0%	67.1%
Malicious URL Attacks	99.1%	68.0%
Malware & Botnets		
Malware Download over HTTPS	100.0%	61.3%
Compressed Malicious Files	94.2%	60.2%
Botnets	100.0%	58.3%
Browser-Based Threats		
Browser Exploits	100.0%	74.0%
Cookie Stealing - HTTP	100.0%	85.0%
Cookie Stealing - HTTPS	100.0%	100.0%
Browser Version and Plugin-in Control	100.0%	60.0%
Obfuscated JavaScript	100.0%	90.0%
Data-loss and Leakage		
Phishing Site-Based Attacks	100.0%	56.6%
Adware Site Prevention	PASS	PASS
Standard Threats Average Score	99.5%	69.5%

Table 2. Standard Threats Protection Testing

The Palo Alto Networks ACFW demonstrates superior blocking capabilities compared to the average and scored 100% in all but two categories.

4.2 Advanced Cloud Firewall Threat Categories

Advanced Cloud firewalls must extend their protective capabilities to counter advanced threats, which are often sophisticated, highly evolved, and challenging to detect or neutralize. Such threats may employ various tactics and techniques to circumvent traditional security measures. As a pivotal component of any organization's cybersecurity infrastructure, a robust cloud firewall should possess threat detection capabilities, be able to identify suspicious network traffic patterns and have the capacity to block in real time.

The Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall was tested against eight attack types classified as advanced threats. Table 3 below provides the results from these tests.

Advanced Threat Classification	Palo Alto Networks ACFW Inspection Score	SecureQLab ACFW Group Test Average Score
Advanced Evasive Techniques (Application-based)	100.0%	79.6%
Advanced Evasive Techniques (Network-based)	100.0%	75.0%
Known Malicious Files	98.5%	60.2%
Malicious Documents	95.0%	59.3%
Active Cloud-Based Threats (aka Active Threats)	100.0%	46.5%
Advanced Persistent Threats (APT)	100.0%	65.0%
Cloud-Centric Post Exploitation Techniques (Post-Exploitation – DNS Tunnelling)	100.0%	45.0%
Cloud-Centric Post Exploitation Techniques (Post-Exploitation – ICMP Tunnelling)	100.0%	60.0%
Advanced Threats Average Score	99.2%	61.3%

Table 3. Advanced (Non-Standard) Threat Protection Testing

The Advanced Cloud Firewall Threat average scores are calculated by averaging the scores for each threat type together within their respective attack category. Palo Alto Networks performed well in these tests compared to the average and again scored 100% in all but two categories.

4.3 Operational Accuracy Category

False positive testing was included in the scope of this test because an Advanced Cloud Firewall that prevents 100% of malicious attacks but also prevents legitimate (non-malicious) actions can be vastly

disruptive. SecureQLab used appropriate tools and techniques to ensure that the tested firewall products do not generate significant numbers of alerts with legitimate applications and processes in an enterprise environment. This section of the methodology was performed at the same time as and as part of the validation workflow and other independent sections wherever feasible. The aim is to ensure that the firewall products did not prevent malicious traffic at the expense of operational accuracy.

The Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall was tested for operational accuracy under real-world scenarios during the entire test cycle, and Table 4 below provides the results from these tests.

Operational Accuracy test	Palo Alto Networks ACFW Score	SecureQLab ACFW Group Test Average Score
Resistance to False Positive Test	100.0%	89.8%

Table 4. Operational Accuracy

The Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall performed above average in this test and achieved a perfect score.

4.4 ACFW SSL/TLS Support

Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) and its secure analogue HTTPS have long been crucial internet protocols. HTTPS uses encryption to enhance browsing safety by establishing secure connections between browsers, applications, and websites. To identify the attacks or threats in encrypted connections, the firewall must inspect the encrypted traffic using SSL/TLS ciphers and the associated techniques for managing encrypted connections. To detect a threat concealed within encrypted data, the firewall must decrypt packets, inspect the content, and take necessary action.

For each ACFW tested, SecureQLab tested 22 of the TLS v1.2 ciphers and 3 TLS v1.3 ciphers. The testing included combinations of ciphers between clients and servers to analyze firewall behavior with weak ciphers, to assess how the firewall behaved to communication using different ciphers, and to evaluate the ACFW's ability to fall back or enforce secure ciphers during communication.

The Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall was tested for overall SSL/TLS threat efficacy and its ability to protect against attacks delivered through the supported ciphers in real-world scenarios. The Palo Alto Networks ACFW successfully identified, detected, and prevented all the attacks throughout the entire SSL/TLS test cycle on all supported ciphers. Table 5 below presents the results of these tests.

SSL/TLS Threat Efficacy Test	Palo Alto Networks ACFW Overall Metric	SecureQLab ACFW Group Test Average Score
Overall SSL/TLS Security Efficacy	100.0%	68.4%

Table 5. SSL/TLS Threat Efficacy

The Palo Alto Networks ACFW performed better than average and obtained a perfect score. This is notable given that the average was so low. The cipher suites for TLS v1.2, as highlighted in Table 6 below,

were tested for the Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall.

TLSv1.2 Ciphers	TLS Support	TLS Handshake Result	Attack Traffic Prevention within TLS Session	Operational Validation with Operational TLS Traffic
AES128-GCM-SHA256	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
AES128-SHA	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
AES256-GCM-SHA384	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
AES256-SHA	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
AES256-SHA256	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
DHE-RSA-AES128-SHA	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
DHE-RSA-AES256-SHA	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
DHE-RSA-AES256-SHA256	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
DHE-RSA-CHACHA20-POLY1305	Cipher Not Supported by ACFW Vendor Solution			
ECDHE-ECDSA-AES128-GCM-SHA256	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
ECDHE-ECDSA-AES128-SHA	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
ECDHE-ECDSA-AES128-SHA256	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
ECDHE-ECDSA-AES256-GCM-SHA384	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
ECDHE-ECDSA-AES256-SHA384	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
ECDHE-ECDSA-CHACHA20-POLY1305	Cipher Not Supported by ACFW Vendor Solution			
ECDHE-RSA-AES128-GCM-SHA256	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
ECDHE-RSA-AES128-SHA	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
ECDHE-RSA-AES128-SHA256	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
ECDHE-RSA-AES256-GCM-SHA384	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
ECDHE-RSA-AES256-SHA	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
ECDHE-RSA-AES256-SHA384	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
ECDHE-RSA-CHACHA20-POLY1305	Cipher Not Supported by ACFW Vendor Solution			

Table 6. TLS v1.2 Cipher Support

The Palo Alto Networks ACFW passed all TLS v1.2 cyphers tested that it supported.

The cipher suites for TLS v1.3, as highlighted in Table 7 below, were tested for the Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall.

TLSv1.3 Ciphers	TLS Support	TLS Handshake Result	Attack Traffic Prevention within TLS Session	Operational Validation with Operational TLS Traffic
AES256-GCM-SHA384	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
CHACHA20-POLY1305-SHA256	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass
AES128-GCM-SHA256	Yes	Successful	Pass	Pass

Table 7. TLS v1.3 Cipher Support

As can be seen from the above, the Palo Alto Networks ACFW was able to successfully handle packet decryption and inspection.

5. Security Resiliency Results

Security products must demonstrate overall resiliency, as failure to do so can have significant consequences. The Department of Defense (DoD) defines security resilience as *“The ability of systems to resist, absorb, and recover from or adapt to an adverse occurrence during operation that may cause harm, destruction, or loss of ability to perform mission-related functions.”*

SecureQLab has adopted a novel approach to define the firewall resiliency metrics. Our security resiliency rating combines security efficacy with key operational and cloud-based performance metrics based on a real-world scenario. This holistic approach considers the firewall’s security efficacy (threat protection) and operational efficiency metrics mapped to crucial capabilities and ACFW workflows relevant to enterprise use cases subjected to real-world traffic.

The security resiliency test used a simulated real-world cloud-based traffic mix. The traffic mix was based on internet use by eight specific industry verticals: Enterprise, Small-to-Medium Businesses (SMB), Remote Office Branch Office (ROBO), Healthcare and Educational organizations, Media and Entertainment, and Financial and Retail organizations. As outlined in v1.6 of the SecureQLab Advanced Cloud Firewall CyberRisk Validation Methodology, the primary objective of the security resiliency-based test is NOT to push the cloud security solution under test to its maximum limits but to ensure it remains operationally and functionally viable up to at least at 50% of its throughput.

The ability of the Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall to pass each stage of the security resiliency test was based on the following criteria:

- **PASS** = Security resiliency protection rate (%) must be $\geq 95\%$ against all attacks under load.
- **PASS** = Overall solution throughput (%) must be $\geq 95\%$ (at steady state) of the maximum tested ACFW cloud throughput numbers.

- **PASS** = Overall application traffic success rate (%) must be $\geq 95\%$ of all real-world application traffic validated against a specific cloud-based scenario.

The Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall was tested for security resiliency under real-world scenarios during the entire test cycle, and Table 8 below provides the results from these tests.

Real World Cloud-based Traffic Scenario Mix	Security Resiliency Protection Rating	Overall Solution Throughput	Overall Application Traffic Success Rate
Media and Entertainment Companies	Pass	Pass	Pass
Healthcare Organization	Pass	Pass	Pass
Financial Institution	Pass	Pass	Pass
Enterprise	Pass	Pass	Pass
Small-to-Medium Business (SMB)	Pass	Pass	Pass
Educational Institution	Pass	Pass	Pass
Retail Companies	Pass	Pass	Pass
Remote office Branch Office (ROBO)	Pass	Pass	Pass

Table 8. Security Resiliency

The Palo Alto Networks ACFW passed all Security Resiliency tests.

6. Operational Efficiency Results

ACFW operational efficiency measures the tested ACFW's operating burden and complexity of setup and use. As such, the Operational Efficiency Score measures both the ability of the ACFW to detect and respond to cyber-attacks appropriately and ease of use. The operational efficiency was evaluated by considering factors such as:

- The ease of tuning the ACFW security policy and configuration (pre-and-post deployment)
- The solution's incident response and management intuitiveness from a policy and security configuration perspective
- Compliance check
- Risk assessment and mitigation capabilities
- Enhanced security metrics reporting capabilities
- The ease of managing and controlling assets and business continuity with appropriate configuration and policy backup (with restoration)

In the analysis, the Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall was rated high, medium, or low across 12 operational efficiency categories, as identified in Table 9 below. For more details on each of the categories, please [contact SecureQLab](#).

The Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall was tested for operational efficiency, considering real-world enterprise procurement, deployment, and active scenarios throughout the test life cycle. Table 9 below presents an impressive overall operational efficiency score of 95.8%.

Operational Efficiency	Palo Alto Networks ACFW Score	SecureQLab ACFW Group Test Average Score
Overall Operational Efficiency Score	95.8%	75.2%

Table 9. Overall Operational Efficiency Score

Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall solution had high operational efficiency capabilities in the 12 validated categories of operational efficiency, as highlighted in Table 10 below.

ACFW Operational Efficiency Metrics	Palo Alto Networks VM-Series Virtual Next-Generation Firewall	SecureQLab ACFW Group Test Average Score
Security Policy Configuration	High	Med
Security Policy Management	High	High
Asset Management	High	High
Access Control	High	High
Compliance Management	High	High
Business Continuity Management	High	Med
Risk Assessment & Mitigation	High	Med
Security Metrics Reporting	High	High
Backup & Restore	High	Med
Analytics	High	Med
Customer Support	High	Med
License Management	High	High

Table 10: Operational Efficiency Results.

Table 10 shows that the Palo Alto Networks ACFW performed better than average and ranked high in all operational efficiency categories tested.

7. Key ACFW Solution Differentiators – Vendor Perspective

Palo Alto Networks states the following reasons why customers choose their security solutions:

Minimize business and organizational risk of perimeter-based security architectures by eliminating implicit trust and continuously validating every stage of digital interaction with a Zero-Trust strategy. Palo Alto Networks portfolio enables customers to implement an integrated & continuous risk monitoring approach to uncover blind spots, anomalies, hidden patterns, and threat vectors to monitor and manage third-party risks proactively.

Increased operational efficiency by simplifying company infrastructure with an integrated security platform that unifies security, policy, and management across the network and cloud under the same centralized platform. Gain contextual security outcomes and stay ahead of threats with a proactive, data-driven security approach that provides consistent visibility and control across your entire enterprise.

Cut the costs of delivering security with streamlined procurement, reduced integration points and deployment time, less risk of time and budget overruns, reduced implementation effort, and increased training.

Secure Access for the Hybrid Workforce provides a robust Secure Access Service Edge (SASE) solution, including Zero Trust Network Access 2.0, to safeguard remote users.

Multi-Cloud Protection provides Cloud Native Application Protection Platform (CNAPP) with modular, adaptable components for end-to-end security from development to deployment across cloud environments.

Advanced Security Operations from Cortex XDR and XSIAM portfolio bring cutting-edge AI and automation into the security operations center (SOC), equipping teams to stay ahead.

Partnership in Digital Transformation, for which Palo Alto Networks leverages a network of experts and partners to offer tailored insights and enhance cybersecurity measures and results.

Threat Intelligence and Incident Response with Unit 42 positioning Palo Alto Networks as a top choice for breach response among cyber insurance carriers.

Palo Alto Networks includes a range of prestigious enterprises, including 10 top Fortune 100 companies, 9 of the 10 largest manufacturing companies and utilities, and 7 of the 10 largest oil & gas firms worldwide.

The above is included to show how Palo Alto Networks sees its products and its competitive posture.

8. Conclusion

The Palo Alto Networks PAYG VM-Series Virtual NextGen Firewall with Advanced Security Subs, 24x7 Support' AMI, PAN-OS version 11.0.2-h2 performed impressively in our test. It was not just above average in one or two categories—instead, it was among the best in every category. In threat detection and response, it was not only above average, but was also above average by a significant margin. In threat detection and response, it was also consistently near the maximum possible score. It did this while being above average at avoiding false positives, and while maintaining sufficient ease of use to have above-average operational efficiency.

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For more information about SecureQLab and the testing methodologies, please visit our website.

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