

Starting from scratch: schools group simplifies and secures cloud backup and security with Barracuda



With nine schools, four separate networks and over 6,000 staff and students to manage, Stephen Hardy had his work cut out when he joined Stowe Valley Multi Academy Trust (MAT) as Director of IT. The partnership of community primary and secondary schools based in Warwickshire was only around a year old. But Hardy was soon tasked with a strategy to streamline and simplify IT by centralizing onto Azure and Office 365. The challenge was supporting staff and student productivity online whilst keeping cyber-threats at bay and bolstering Office 365's limited retention policies.

Like most schools, the MAT is heavily exposed to phishing attacks arriving via email. Even though most of these aren't targeted specifically at theft of school data, they represent a major reputational and compliance risk. Successful account takeover attacks, for example, could lead to a barrage of phishing emails being sent from a school domain, which requires apology email follow-ups to all recipients.

There are also GDPR repercussions, in that access to an Office 365 account could theoretically open the door to Teams and OneDrive data, explains Hardy. This means possible access to personal staff and student data and the School Information Management System (SIMS).

From greenfield to now

Starting with a completely greenfield site, the discussions began with Barracuda's partner Epaton and focused initially on backup. Having worked with the firm many years, Hardy trusted it to deliver the right technology fit for his organization.

"Our initial discussions with Epaton centred on the deployment of a streamlined and unified backup and we discussed combining that with security from a single provider,"

Profile

- A UK -based Multi Academy Trust (MAT) featuring nine schools
- Around 6,200 staff and students

Challenges

- Uptick in phishing emails due to COVID-19
- Reputational and compliance impact from account takeovers (ATO)
- Back-up of vital teaching data stored in Teams and OneDrive during lockdown

Solution

- Barracuda Networks Cloud-to-Cloud Backup
- Barracuda Total Email Protection

Results

- Has freed up time for IT team
- Helps to mitigate regulatory (GDPR) fallout
- Protects MAT's reputation by stopping serious ATO attacks
- Blocks thousands of email threats each months
- Backup provides peace-of-mind for Office 365 data

he explains. “In the end we got a really cost-effective backup solution that gave us exactly what we wanted, when we needed it, and was really quick and easy to install as it was all cloud-based.”

Hardy chose Barracuda’s Cloud-to-Cloud Backup and Total Email Protection. Barracuda had the edge by offering something significantly better priced than the competition, but which matched other shortlisted vendors for feature-rich capabilities. Installation took just three hours per tenant for the combined solution, with Hardy making good use of Barracuda’s intuitive online Knowledgebase.

“In just one month, the solution quarantined nearly 1,100 emails, and blocked over 4,600 outright.”

Invested in success

The results have already been impressive. Total Email Protection has helped to repel the vast majority of email-borne threats facing the MAT, thanks to AI-based threat detection in Sentinel and Advanced Threat Protection (ATP). In just one month, the solution quarantined nearly 1,100 emails, and blocked over 4,600 outright. It also provides visibility into the source of threats, so that the IT team can block by country of origin if required.

Barracuda’s email security helps to mitigate GDPR compliance risk for the schools by automatically alerting when any attack has the potential to compromise the personal data of staff and students. It also eases the workload for IT, in sending automated email alerts following rare account takeovers and accelerating incident response to just minutes.

“Just to be able to say ‘a phishing email came from this person with this subject line, now find me all instances of that and delete all emails across these tenants whilst forcing password changes’—that would take half a day in Office 365. To do that in Barracuda, from a single pane of glass, takes just five minutes.”

Stephen Hardy

Director of IT

Stowe Valley Multi Academy Trust

On the back-up side, the MAT has so far not been called upon to restore data, although it is a common event in the education sector. However, with Barracuda Networks Cloud-to-Cloud backup in place Hardy and his team have peace-of-mind that teaching materials and other vital data stored in the Teams and OneDrive can be retrieved if the worst happens. Barracuda is also on hand to support the MAT and Hardy’s team as they continue to expand, adding new users and schools.

“Barracuda and Epaton definitely treat it like they’ve got a vested interest in your organization,” concludes Hardy. “Your success is important to them because it’s their success too.”

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