CASE STUDY

CDW SECURITY TEAM HELPS PROTECT COVENTRY UNIVERSITY FROM CYBERATTACK.

OVERVIEW

- CDW's security team assists Coventry University in the adoption of an advanced endpoint protection cybersecurity solution.

- The project involved insight into the performance of cloud-native CrowdStrike platform.

- The partnership helps Coventry University secure advantageous commercial terms.

ABOUT COVENTRY UNIVERSITY

- Coventry University gained its university status in 1992 and is now a global enterprise with multiple campuses and research partnerships across the world.

- Around 29,000 undergraduate and 6,000 postgraduate students undertake courses at the university at any one time.

- The university has a global reputation in various academic disciplines related to health, design and engineering, performing arts, computing and other subjects.

> " We had a good idea of where we wanted to get to, but didn't know how to start. We knew CDW's Security team could act as a trusted advisor."
>
> — **Steve Rogers, Enterprise Cloud, Infrastructure and Security Architect at Coventry University.**

CHALLENGE

Universities deal with an ever-evolving security threat. Each year, thousands of new students join their network, many connecting through their own devices. This can create additional vulnerabilities if not handled correctly, potentially leading to a cyberattack.

Managing this threat proved challenging for the IT team at Coventry University, which is responsible for the management of a wide range of infrastructure from desktop to data centre. "We have a very distributed IT set up," says Steve Rogers, Enterprise Cloud, Infrastructure and Security Architect at Coventry University. "This includes 600 servers, 9,000 endpoints across all regions, an enormous applications portfolio, and high-speed networks running in most areas worldwide."

"But when we performed a gap analysis on security, the weakest area was always the user and the endpoint. New students bring their own devices onto the network, and this can create a threat. It was not enough to rely on traditional antivirus technologies. We had to do something different."

The university, in partnership with CDW, identified three cloud-native endpoint protection solutions, running a 30-day trial of each product. This evaluation produced mixed results. "We managed to beat two of the security technologies ourselves simply by taking a piece of publicly available ransomware and altering parts of the code," says Steve Rogers. "However, one of the solutions – a cloud-delivered endpoint protection platform with machine learning offered by CrowdStrike – was identifying and blocking everything we threw at it. It was a hugely impressive solution, and was the ideal fit for our needs."

But the team at Coventry University needed assistance with further technology assessment and supplier engagement. The CrowdStrike solution comprised a variety of different modules that required further evaluation. The university also wanted to explore commercial options based on the provision of managed services.

Coventry University

CROWDSTRIKE

CDW PEOPLE WHO GET IT

SOLUTION

CDW had worked with Coventry University for several years, helping it upgrade firewalls and networks and purchase software licenses from Microsoft, Amazon, and Cisco. Specifically, the security team had previously helped the university understand its risk profile and identify security gaps, while providing guidance around new technologies and their implementation.

This existing relationship basis provided a solid foundation for collaborative working on endpoint protection, with the CDW security team reviewing the technical shortcomings of the university's current approach. Then they helped the university to establish precisely which CrowdStrike modules would be required for deployment and how the solution would fit into the broader security landscape.

The CDW team managed all aspects of supplier engagement, enabling the university to establish a clear route to market. "We had recently added CrowdStrike to our trusted partner ecosystem due to the market-leading technical capability that it could provide," says Bruno Aguiar, Security Solutions Architect at CDW. "The CrowdStrike solution has been shown to resolve numerous challenges for clients, including device protection, incident response and vulnerability management. The strength of this relationship meant that we could bring forward a partner that had previously delivered and provided proven technical outcomes to customer requirements."

The nature of academic funding mechanisms means it is difficult for universities to afford to pay upfront costs. CDW therefore negotiated a three-year managed services contract with annual billing. This gave the university better visibility of costs and made the investment far more serviceable.

> **As an IT team, we are trying to break out of the mould of sentimental attachment to particular vendors. CDW does an excellent job of providing a high-level overview of all the latest technologies that are available in the fast-paced market.**
>
> – Steve Rogers, Enterprise Cloud, Infrastructure and Security Architect at Coventry University.

For Steve Rogers, the depth of knowledge and insight inside CDW's security team helped convince the university that it was investing in the right technology. "We valued its recommendations and relied on the introduction to the right people."

Ultimately, the supplier engagement activities put the university in an excellent position to move forward with the project, with CrowdStrike adopted on a managed services contract on flexible yearly terms.

OUTCOME

"The CrowdStrike solution was deployed in November of 2020 and quickly proved its worth. In the first six months of installation, it detected every endpoint threat directed at the university's network, stops breaches by preventing and responding to all types of attacks. This performance represents a significant improvement on what had gone before", says Steve Rogers.

"We had been dodging bullets for a long time, and it was taking us days to recover from the impact of attacks that did get through," he says. "With CrowdStrike, even unknown pieces of ransomware were instantly detected and stopped, and the whole clean-up process has never taken longer than 44 minutes from start to finish. So, it has been an extremely impressive solution from the outset."

Moving forward, CDW and the university are set to work together on other projects related to firewall replacement and a security review. In addition, the university expects to be entirely cloud-based by 2023, with no on-premises infrastructure, with CDW playing a central role in that digital transformation.

"It is an exciting time," adds Steve Rogers. "We are looking at moving our virtual desktop capability into the cloud so that our students can access all the latest software platforms no matter where they are based. And cybersecurity will be a roller coaster that never stops, so that will require ongoing assessment. Our entire IT strategy is about moving into the online space.

From CDW's perspective, upgrading the university's approach to cybersecurity and supporting its ongoing digital transformation is illustrative of core strengths in the education sector", says Matthew Smith, Education Client Director at CDW. "It has been an absolute pleasure working with Coventry University, where we are seen as a trusted advisor and an extension of the customer's IT team."

"Globally, we are the biggest IT reseller in the education sector, and our experience – allied to the knowledge and support of the security team can help organisations such as universities to reap significant benefits, improving the student experience and building a safer environment."

To learn more about technology solutions by CDW, contact your Account Manager or email customersuccess@uk.cdw.com

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