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Security-as-a-Service for Gartree High School

Solution Overview

- Server refresh
- Microsoft 365 A5 Licenses
- NSure Backup
- Security-as-a-Service
- Remote Management and Monitoring
- Cyber Essentials Training



When Gartree High School's onsite SAN (Storage Area Network) device started flashing with an error light a few days before Christmas, their Network Manager, Stephen Adams, went through the usual troubleshooting issues to fix it.

Nothing else seemed out of the norm, and at that point, the school wasn't concerned.

Fast forward a few hours, and Leicestershire Police's Online Fraud and Cyber Crime unit were on site, helping the school recover from a major ransomware attack.

The error message on the SAN was actually the first indication that Russian cyber attackers had broken through their firewall and were rapidly encrypting all their school data.

Despite having a support contract in place with a leading IT provider, because it was Christmas week, no one was available to help.

Reaching out to Novus

Stephen Adams, Gartree's Network Manager, was given the name of Novus by a fellow education IT professional as someone who might be able to help in a desperate situation like this.

In the days leading up to Christmas, Novus' Managing Director, Donald Allison, got on the phone to Stephen, to provide Gartree with advice and support about the next steps to take.

"Gartree were not one of our clients, but we know from experience with other schools how stressful it can be for in-house IT teams in situations like this," commented Donald. "We've seen first-hand the pressure that IT Managers in schools are under when a cyber attack occurs. And, in many schools, there's just one IT Manager or contact bearing the brunt of the fallout. We knew we had to help."

Thankfully Gartree High School had a cloud backup, so they were able to recover all data despite the onsite storage being encrypted. But this was a wake up call for the school about the risks that many education institutions face, despite having enhanced security provisions in place.

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“The difference with Novus is that I can always get hold of someone knowledgeable. I don’t have to log a support ticket, I can phone up real people who I know well if we’re stuck or need assistance.”

**Stephen Adams, Network Manager,
Gartree High School.**

Moving forward - with a focus on security.

“We had a good security system in place and a support contract – but all of that still didn’t stop attackers penetrating the firewall and getting to our data. Thankfully, due to the investments we’d made in our IT, we were able to recover well from the attack – but we had to take action to prevent this happening again, or worse,” said Stephen Adams, Network Manager.

Following the support and guidance given during the cyber-attack, Gartree decided to move their IT services over to Novus. This started with an infrastructure project to refresh their onsite servers, and an upgrade to their Microsoft licences to include the highest levels of security available.

With Novus’ help, the school moved over to Microsoft 365 and OneDrive for all documents. Staff returned to school for the January term and didn’t notice any difference, but on the back end, everything had changed to being cloud-based with robust security controls in place.

In addition, all onsite IT was backed up via the Novus NSure backup service to a UK-based datacentre, and Novus’ Security-as-a-Service solution was rolled out.

Security-as-a-Service

Novus’ Security-as-a-Service solution involves a comprehensive review of all IT infrastructure, software and processes – across both onsite and cloud environments – and provides recommendations for best protecting a school’s IT and data.

With 24/7 remote management and monitoring, spam filtering, threat detection and malware prevention, Novus’ Security-as-a-Service solution uncovers gaps in an organisation’s security and helps to mitigate as many risks as possible.

“Cyber attacks for schools aren’t about “if” they’re going to happen, it’s about “when” they’re going to happen. We recognise it’s inevitable that we’ll be targeted again at some point, but now we’re confident we have much more measures in place across ongoing monitoring and staff training to better face the attacks head on,” says Stephen.

Proactive security management

Gartree now has a proactive security management system in place, and staff regularly undergo cyber security training involving planned phishing campaigns to check for gaps in staff knowledge. Any suspicious events such as unexpected login locations or unusual download activity are also monitored by Novus' security team, who regularly alert Gartree staff to potential security issues.

"Phishing attacks are getting much more sophisticated, and by investing in staff training through Novus, we can mitigate the risk of an attack occurring rather than dealing with the fallout from an attack after it happens," said Adams. "Staff now regularly come to me to check whether emails are potential phishing emails, so everyone is on board and working together to protect our school."

Staff training is delivered in addition to penetration testing and attack surface training, while Novus' team regularly report back to Gartree with data about the number of attacks mitigated and potential security issues that need addressing.

Part of the Gartree IT team

More importantly, Novus has become an extension of the Gartree IT team, with many of the Novus experts regularly attending calls with Gartree's Network Manager.

"The difference with Novus is that I can always get hold of someone knowledgeable," continues Stephen. "I don't have to log a support ticket, I can phone up real people who I now know well if we're stuck or need assistance. One evening, I was logged onto the Gartree network and got a call from Novus about a suspicious login. It turned out it was me! It's Novus who are proactively getting in touch with me to resolve issues, rather than the other way around."

For more information about how you can improve your own security and resilience, get in touch for an assessment.



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