Coleg Gwent boosts virtualized estate with better cybersecurity

Leading higher education institution in Wales eliminates security-driven endpoint performance issues and improves cybersecurity defenses

Founded in 1910, Coleg Gwent is the largest higher education institution in Usk, Wales. Coleg Gwent has 24,000 students and six locations across South Wales.

Industry
Education

Headquarters
Usk, Wales

Employees
1,300 employees

Results
- Eight ransomware attacks in two years dropped to zero in six years
- Decreased time spent on cleaning and rebuilding infected endpoints
- Streamlined scalability and installation facilitates work-from-home transition
- Elimination of endpoint performance degradation

THE CHALLENGE

When Coleg Gwent, the largest higher education institution in Usk, Wales, was virtualizing thousands of desktops and servers, a problem emerged. The college's security solution was consuming significant compute resources and causing virtualized endpoints to run slowly or even lock up. Also concerning were weekly outages resulting from infected endpoints, requiring IT to travel to classrooms and offices across multiple sites to clean and reimage machines.

To address these issues, Coleg Gwent evaluated alternative security solutions and selected GravityZone Business Security from Bitdefender.

Mike Gower-Fox, ICT Infrastructure Engineer, Coleg Gwent, reflects, "After testing security solutions from Bitdefender, Trend Micro, McAfee, and other vendors, GravityZone Business Security led the pack on many fronts. As the most virtual-aware solution, GravityZone had a minimal footprint and did not slow down the endpoints. GravityZone also was tops in terms of detection rates."

"In addition, we were struck by how much easier it was to deploy GravityZone," continues Gower-Fox. "GravityZone just sailed through all the issues that impeded the other solutions and installed quickly. It also was clear that GravityZone gave us the most value for our money."

THE SOLUTION

Today, Coleg Gwent uses GravityZone Business Security to safeguard 4,800 physical and virtualized servers and desktops running in classrooms and offices in six campus facilities, as well as from remote locations. Bitdefender GravityZone Business Security incorporates proven machine learning techniques, behavioral analysis, and continuous monitoring of running processes to protect against ransomware, phishing, zero-day attacks, and other malware.

Coleg Gwent's server and desktop environments protected by GravityZone include Citrix XenDesktop, macOS, Linux, Microsoft Azure, Microsoft Windows, Nutanix, VMware ESXi, and VMware vSphere. Coleg Gwent's applications, such as Microsoft Active Directory, Microsoft Exchange, Microsoft Office 365, and Microsoft SQL Server, run on endpoints in the GravityZone environment.

In addition, Coleg Gwent uses GravityZone Security for Virtual Env per CPU to minimize impact on cloud computing resources and automate security management across its Citrix, Nutanix, and VMware environments.

THE RESULTS

In the two years preceding Coleg Gwent's installation of GravityZone, there were eight ransomware attacks, as well as weekly infections that would disable a small number of endpoints.

"Before we replaced Symantec with GravityZone, our team spent a lot of time recovering backups and cleaning and reimaging infected endpoints," recalls Gower-Fox. "With an estate of 3,500 endpoints operating across six locations at the time, it was a big job."

"Since we deployed GravityZone six years ago, we have not experienced any ransomware attacks," Gower-Fox says. "When the NotPetya ransomware was spreading worldwide, GravityZone isolated and eradicated it on a couple of laptops operating outside of our network. It gave us a warm fuzzy feeling that GravityZone stopped such an insidious threat before it did any serious damage."

GravityZone also has changed the nature of security administration work at Coleg Gwent, explains Gower-Fox. "Since we have decreased time spent rebuilding and reimaging infected endpoints, I now am more available to investigate potential phishes and other threats. Bitdefender has been such a leap forward because we now have a trustworthy layer in our security onion."

The previous endpoint performance issues have disappeared, reports Gower-Fox: "We used to get calls from users who reported their desktops would lock up when security scanning was in progress. It got even worse when we virtualized because multiple virtual machines were competing for resources on the same virtual host. GravityZone took the load off the virtual machines with its small footprint. In fact, I'm not aware of anyone's endpoint locking up due to GravityZone."

The scalability of GravityZone also has facilitated making remote work secure and safe at Coleg Gwent.

Gower-Fox reflects, "As the pandemic hit, we started issuing laptops across the organization so people could work at home. We also are adding more laptops in the classrooms. The easy installation and scalability of GravityZone has supported these initiatives with advanced security as we continue to grow from 4,800 to 8,000 endpoints in the next year."

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Mike Gower-Fox, ICT Infrastructure Engineer, Coleg Gwent

Bitdefender Footprint

- GravityZone Business Security
- GravityZone Security for Virtualized Environments

IT Environment

- Citrix XenDesktop
- Microsoft Active Directory
- Microsoft Azure
- Microsoft Exchange
- Microsoft Office 365
- Microsoft SQL Server
- Nutanix
- VMware ESXi
- VMware vSphere

Operating Systems

- Linux
- macOS
- Microsoft Windows

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