

Northeast Iowa Community College teaches ransomware a lesson

Strong security for physical and virtual endpoints



THE CHALLENGE

For most, a solid education is essential to fulfilling their personal and professional goals. That goes right to the heart of NICC's mission. Whether preparing students to transfer to a four-year college, directly enter the workforce, or add new skills to advance their careers, NICC is there to help them on their educational journey. In recent years, though, cyberattacks were starting to create disruptions to learning.

Malware and viruses were bypassing the college's previous endpoint protection and infecting a few PCs used by students and faculty. In one instance, ransomware locked up some files on user profiles, preventing a few users from accessing files they needed.

"It took us three or four days to recover those files for users after the ransomware attack," says Mohammad Shahrivar, NICC's network coordinator. "It was clear we needed stronger endpoint security."

Part of the problem was that NICC's servers are 99 percent virtualized and its old endpoint security didn't support virtualized environments. The legacy solution also couldn't protect hundreds of virtual desktops used by faculty and administrators. On top of that, it lacked centralized management, making endpoint security updates tedious and time-consuming.

THE SOLUTION

After evaluating solutions from Bitdefender, Sophos and Kaspersky, NICC chose Bitdefender GravityZone Business Security. The reason: Bitdefender ranked top in independent studies, with the most complete feature set to protect both physical and virtual endpoints across the college's 13 locations.

The college deployed GravityZone Business Security on premise to protect about 100 VMware virtual servers and approximately 250 VMware View virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) clients for faculty and staff. NICC also deployed GravityZone Business Security in the cloud to safeguard more than 2,100 college-owned desktops, laptops and tablets for students to use. Thanks to built-in features to automatically discover network computers, NICC completed each deployment within two to three days.



Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC) serves eight counties in northeast Iowa and surrounding areas with two campuses and 11 service locations, offering more than 85 academic programs. NICC, with more than 5,000 full- and part-time students, is committed to providing accessible, affordable, quality education and training to its communities.

Industry

Education

Headquarters

Calmar, Iowa, U.S.A.

Employees

1,100 (IT staff, 9)

Results

- Experienced zero endpoint infections in four years
- Reduced number of false positives
- Shortened security updates from weeks to seconds
- Decreased daily security administration time from a few hours to 90 minutes or less

THE RESULTS

With Bitdefender GravityZone Business Security guarding its endpoints, NICC has experienced no disruption from malware or other cyber threats in the four years since installing the solution. That's because Bitdefender automatically identifies and blocks cyberattacks that could disrupt learning. The college even skirted the recent WannaCry ransomware outbreak that paralyzed 230,000-plus computers worldwide.

Plus, the number of false positives dropped considerably, sparing IT the time and frustration of chasing after non-events. With easy-to-set security policies, NICC could activate key features like Advanced Threat Control and Intrusion Detection and enable precise and accurate control of potential threats.

Since Bitdefender provides NICC with centralized management, applying security updates to endpoints is much faster and easier than before. Previously, NICC had to manually update devices one by one. With thousands of PCs and devices across 13 sites spanning a 120-square mile area, an update would take weeks, in part due to all the travel. Now, network coordinators can update physical and virtual endpoints automatically from the central management console in seconds.

Everyday administration is also easier. Managing physical endpoints through the cloud-based GravityZone Business Security solution requires less than 90 minutes of administration time per day compared to a few hours in the past. While NICC previously lacked a security solution for virtual servers and VDI, managing these devices through the on premise GravityZone Business Security solution takes only about one hour weekly.

"With GravityZone Business Security, it's easy to keep all our physical and virtual endpoints protected," says Bob Kennedy, NICC network technician. "Cyberthreats like ransomware are no longer a concern, which helps everyone at the college feel more secure and focused on learning without distractions."

"With GravityZone Business Security, it's easy to keep all our physical and virtual endpoints protected. Cyberthreats like ransomware are no longer a concern, which helps everyone at the college feel more secure and focused on learning without distractions."

Bob Kennedy, Network Coordinator,
NICC

Bitdefender Footprint

GravityZone Business Security

IT Environment

- VMware Horizon View
- VMware vSphere

Operating Systems

- Microsoft Windows