



Higher (Purpose) Education: Proofpoint Keeps Grand Canyon University Protected with People-Centric Approach

GRAND CANYON UNIVERSITY®

The Challenge

- Protect against a barrage of phishing emails
- Prevent attackers from stealing credentials and delivering ransomware and other malicious payloads
- Keep sensitive data protected without hindering users' productivity

The Solution

- Proofpoint Targeted Attack Protection
- Proofpoint Email Fraud Defense
- Proofpoint Threat Response
- Proofpoint Threat Response Auto Pull
- Proofpoint Data Loss Prevention
- Proofpoint TAP Isolation Personal Browsing Defense (now Browser Isolation)

The Company

Grand Canyon University (GCU), founded in 1949, has 19,000 students on campus and another 71,000 online. This makes it the largest Christian university in the U.S.

This Phoenix-based private school maintains faith as its cornerstone. For its leaders, that means imparting not just an academic curriculum but also the values and principles that students need for success—as much in life as in the workplace.

The Challenge

When Michael Manrod arrived at Grand Canyon University to be its director of security in 2017, he was faced with a barrage of phishing emails and other threats. His team was stretched thin as attackers tried to steal credentials and infect the faculty with ransomware and other malware.

“We were just being completely inundated,” Manrod said. “If the attacks were well crafted, they got through 100% of the time with our old security solution.”

Educational institutions often have a rich trove of data, such as intellectual property, breakthrough research or other valuable information. And “attackers would love to get their hands on it,” he says.

Education is among the top three industries targeted by email fraud threats, according to the Proofpoint Quarterly Threat Report for the first quarter of 2019.¹ Educational entities reported about 80 “imposter messages” per targeted organization in the quarter. That’s much higher than the average of 47 such messages across all industries.

¹ Proofpoint. Quarterly Threat Report, May 2019.

The Results

- Stopped email-based malware and malicious URLs
- Secured employees' personal email and internet browsing with browser isolation
- Unified visibility to help reveal who's attacking and how to stop them

Furthermore, Manrod has seen other schools commandeered as a “beachhead” for attacking other institutions.

The Solution

The Proofpoint people-centric approach to cybersecurity

Proofpoint takes a people-centric approach to cybersecurity. It focuses on threats that target people on all the channels they rely on—email, the cloud, web, social media and more.

Proofpoint Targeted Attack Protection helps the school manage bulk mail and stop advanced threats before they reach users' inboxes. Proofpoint Threat Response helps it more quickly contain and resolve threats by automating many aspects of incident response. It can even pull unsafe email from users' inboxes after it's already been delivered or forwarded.

At the same time, Proofpoint URL Defense analyzes and rewrites outgoing links in email to stop people from clicking through to unsafe URLs. The feature keeps staff members safe, no matter where they check email or what device they use.

“We are excited about the capabilities that Proofpoint is well known for, as well as the capabilities that are emerging and that we think are forward-thinking and innovative.”

Michael Manrod, director of security, Grand Canyon Education

People targeted for what they do, not just their titles

Thanks to a people-centric approach to threats, the university can identify its VAP or Very Attacked People at GCU who are most heavily targeted in cyber attacks. They're not just the C-level executives most would expect to be hit, but other people such as administrative assistants. And they often have access to sensitive data, key Microsoft 365 calendars and contacts, and more.

“The attackers obviously want the power of those people's roles for themselves and for their own malicious objectives,” Manford explained.

Web isolation

Grand Canyon is also impressed with new forward-thinking Proofpoint technology. That includes Proofpoint Browser Isolation. The solution helps control the risk from users' internet activities by keeping it separate from the school's network and systems. The aim is to make sure that users checking personal email and browsing the web aren't bringing in malicious attachments to the campus environment.

The Results

The Proofpoint solution has blocked and contained most email attacks—thousands of malicious attachments and URLs on any given day, Manrod says.

“Email is key,” he says. “That’s how a huge number of threats, especially effective ones, come in. Proofpoint has done a really good job stopping a large number of those.”

When someone is identified as a Very Attacked Person, the security team can apply added layers of protection, such as impostor email defenses. Proofpoint Email Fraud Defense stops attacks that use impersonation and social engineering to trick people into sending money and sensitive information.

That user’s threat activity is also monitored more heavily so that the team can respond more quickly if something goes wrong.

Proofpoint has even made the team’s other defenses more effective by stopping threats at the email gateway—long before they enter the university’s environment. Most strategically, the tools have helped the university take a more people-centric approach to security rather than focusing on a network perimeter that is not the concern it once was in today’s cloud computing era.

“Identity is becoming the new perimeter,” he said.

“Awareness, as we move into this new paradigm, is key.”

Given the severity of the cybersecurity threat Grand Canyon faced when he came on board, Manrod is impressed with how much security has improved with Proofpoint on the watch. He’s also impressed with not just the current Proofpoint portfolio, but with its security vision for the future.

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