

Email security and backup keeps Northern Ireland's largest college safe from the scourge of ransomware



Belfast Metropolitan College IT Operations Manager, Liam Downey, understands perfectly the cyber challenges that lurk behind digital transformation projects.

"It is a challenging environment," he says. "We're always at the edge trying to use the next generation of technologies, but this could also leave us vulnerable. That's why we need the right protection, or we'll end up in a bad place."

Fortunately, the college is very much in a good place thanks to Liam's foresight in deploying [Barracuda Email Protection](#) including Barracuda [Cloud-to-Cloud Backup](#). With three-quarters (75%) of further education institutions in the UK [last year admitting](#) to suffering a breach, Belfast Metropolitan College is in the minority. As part of a defense-in-depth strategy, the platform has successfully kept serious cyber-threats such as ransomware at bay, while delivering much-needed peace of mind for Liam and his team.

Twenty thousand reasons for effective backup

There are plenty of data risks in a college the size of Belfast Met. Not only must the IT team securely manage 1,400 staff and 5,000 end-user devices, but there's the small matter of its 20,000 students—each of whom has their own Microsoft 365 account. With coursework, teaching materials, and personal information stored in OneDrive, Teams, and elsewhere in the Microsoft platform, that's a potentially large attack surface to defend.

However, when the college first reached out to Barracuda it was for data backup.

"We realized that, whereas in the past we'd backed up and restored on-prem, we could no longer do that. Microsoft does

Profile

- Belfast Metropolitan College (Belfast Met) is the largest further and higher education college in Northern Ireland
- The IT team manages security for around 20,000 students, 1,400 staff and 5,000 end-user devices

Challenges

- Student assignments that are accidentally "deleted"
- Limited Microsoft backup and restore features
- Phishing and ransomware threats

Solutions

- Barracuda Email Protection
- Barracuda Cloud-to-Cloud Backup

Benefits

- Peace of mind for the IT team
- Belfast Met has kept ransomware and phishing at bay

keep a copy of data for 90 days but after that, it's gone," Liam explains. "In our education environment, students love to tell you they had an important file, but it seems to have disappeared. So, we needed to be able to prove either the files weren't there in the first place or to restore them."

After researching the market thoroughly, Liam settled on Barracuda, with an affordable package that included a great deal more than just backup.

From backup to threat protection

Barracuda Email Protection provides complete email security for Microsoft 365 against all email threat types. It includes artificial intelligence for impersonation and phishing protection, cloud email gateway defenses, incident response, security awareness training, data protection and compliance capabilities. That's a full gamut of email protection capabilities to prevent, detect and respond to threats, secure and backup sensitive data, and support compliance requirements.

Barracuda Cloud-to-Cloud Backup offers highly granular backup and restore for Teams, Exchange, SharePoint, and OneDrive data. Point-in-time retrieval and both scheduled, and on-demand backup add flexibility for organizations, while comprehensive reporting and email alerting enhance transparency and control.

Key to the suite's security capabilities is Advanced Threat Protection (ATP), which uses layered behavioral and static analysis and CPU-emulation sandboxing to detect even unknown, covert threats.

Minimizing cyber risk

Belfast Met was soon reaping the benefits of Barracuda in ransomware prevention. Phishing remains one of the top three initial access vectors for such threats, and with so many staff and student Microsoft 365 inboxes, the college had good reason to be concerned. Liam explains that threat actors would

typically look to phish users' logins, then use their access to exploit system vulnerabilities, escalate privileges and then steal data, before deploying their ransomware payload.

However, thanks to Barracuda this pathway to compromise has been blocked for potential attackers. As such, the solution has quickly proven itself to be indispensable.

"We were naively using just Microsoft 365 spam filters and carrying on like that beforehand," says Liam. "But if we went out to buy a new backup product today, we'd have to purchase an additional solution to do advanced threat protection, because it's added so much in cutting out phishing and email threats."

The threat prevention capabilities have dovetailed neatly with Barracuda's backup solution to mitigate ransomware risk all-round, Liam continues.

"We try to prevent things as much as we can but then we have the recovery element if the worst does happen, which is where the Barracuda solution comes in," he explains. "It's air-gapped from the internet so if someone did come in, they couldn't encrypt our backups, and we could restore."

Belfast Met has been so impressed with the suite that Liam has recommended it to other colleges, which have purchased the solution on his recommendation. As for the future, the IT team are currently looking into ways to optimize their use of the suite, by unlocking many of the features yet to be tried.

"It helps me sleep at night," Liam concludes. "We haven't had a major ransomware or phishing attack coming into the college and we'd credit Barracuda with facilitating that. It's an important part of the mechanism to protect us getting attacked and to allow us to restore if we ever were attacked."

**Learn more about
Barracuda Email Protection and
Barracuda Cloud-to-Cloud Backup**

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