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Oral Roberts University Enrolls Mimecast to Defend Against Crippling Email Attacks

Securing 1,000 employee email accounts is no easy task for the team at Oral Roberts University. Add in anywhere from 4,000-5,000 full-time enrolled students – and countless alumni accounts – and you have a prime target for threat actors. Especially working with a hybrid environment across Microsoft Exchange and Office 365.

"It's harder to control university email accounts because it's a revolving door every four years," said Ron Lee, Director of Infrastructure and Cybersecurity at Oral Roberts. "On top of staff, there's a fresh crop of students every year who may not be thinking in terms of responsible cybersecurity habits." And that's exactly why they turned to Mimecast to revamp their email security strategy.

Vision

Lee knew the university's cybersecurity strategy needed an overhaul while working with their previous provider, Barracuda. "Everything was very manual, and it took a long time to conduct searches and set up rules. They were overly broad which resulted in a lot of false positives that had to be manually reviewed and released. It was a very labor-intensive process," said Lee.

On top of that his team felt that Barracuda's solution was never set up properly.

At a Glance

Oral Roberts University is a liberal arts university located in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The University employs around 1,000 and has anywhere from 4,000-5,000 fulltime students enrolled each year.

Problem

The IT and cybersecurity team at Oral Roberts lacked a robust email security solution that was properly implemented and were in search of a solution that would streamline many of the manual, time consuming processes.

Solution

Mimecast Email Security, Mimecast Awareness Training

Benefits

- Less time spent manually reviewing and releasing emails

- Better positioned to defend against email threats despite thousands of students enrolling and graduating each year

- Able to effectively communicate cyber hygiene best practices to staff

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"We were hit by a mass email attack that took down our system for quite a while. It was too much for the system to handle," Lee noted.

Too much time was being wasted troubleshooting and losing valuable time to manual processes. Precious time that could mean the difference between stopping threats in their tracks or not. "Our biggest attack surface and vulnerability are our users and the number one threat vector used to reach them is email," said Lee. "It's hard to control because you're dealing with people. But it was clear that the system in place wasn't getting the job done."

Strategy

The final straw came when thousands of Oral Roberts student email addresses were compromised as part of a data breach at an online textbook retailer. "Threat actors were using those accounts to launch phishing attacks on other students. We had to manually terminate about 1,000 email accounts as a result," said Lee. "For about a six-month period it was a daily struggle to keep up with the sheer number of compromised accounts."

Ultimately, the Oral Roberts team decided that Mimecast was the right vendor to partner with to bolster their email security defenses and streamline manual processes that were taking up so much of their time.

Outcome

The impact of Mimecast Email Security was felt before the solution was fully up and running. "I've implemented many different products over the years, and this was one of the most well executed implementations I've ever seen," said Lee.

"The process was clearly defined, and you could tell this was not the first time Mimecast has worked with a hybrid environment."

Perhaps the biggest impact the team has experienced so far has been the amount of time Mimecast saves them. "Overnight, we used to have 40-50 false positive emails that we would have to review and release. Now with Mimecast Email Security, that number is down to five, sometimes even zero," Lee said.

And in addition to Mimecast Email Security, Oral Roberts is using Mimecast Awareness Training to educate employees on what to do, and not do, when it comes to using their university email accounts and devices. "Mimecast Awareness Training is educational, engaging, and the perfect way for us to communicate with employees on a monthly basis and have a regular cadence without it feeling like an overwhelming assignment," said Lee.

"The bottom line is that Mimecast is doing its job – and we have a lot more confidence that what we're doing is effective as a result. Mimecast has helped get rid of many manual processes that were eating up our valuable time. And we're better positioned to protect university email accounts, our employees and students as a result."

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