K12 Case Study

Beyond Patchwork Defenses: MSD Martinsville's Shift to Advanced Cybersecurity

OVERVIEW

Indiana's MSD Martinsville school district supports approximately 4,500 students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade across its 13 buildings. Focused on maintaining a safe and secure educational environment, Director of Technology Will Miers, prioritized enhancing their cybersecurity infrastructure in response to escalating digital threats.

After a neighboring district suffered a severe ransomware losing $1 million and thousands of student records, Miers decided their patchwork security solutions left them vulnerable to increasingly sophisticated phishing attacks and potential malware from human errors. It was time to overhaul their inadequate cybersecurity defenses with better protection.

SOLUTION

In search of a stronger cybersecurity posture, Martinsville worked with their technology solutions vendor Five Star to initiate several proofs of concept with leading providers, including ActZero, Sophos, and Sentinel One. ActZero was chosen over the others for its ease of integration, effectiveness, and autonomous response capabilities. Miers explained the other providers sounded the alarm, but only ActZero took care of the problem.

CHALLENGES

Disjointed Security Measures: Prior to a comprehensive overhaul, MSD Martinsville relied on a disjointed array of cybersecurity tools, leaving the district vulnerable to attacks.

Unprotected Download Activities: Educators download educational materials from unvetted websites, including platforms like "Teachers Pay Teachers." These activities introduced additional risks, exposing the district to sophisticated phishing attacks and malware.

ActZero
a WatchGuard brand
actzero.ai

> We've been thoroughly impressed with ActZero from the initial evaluation to full deployment. Our partnership has strengthened our cybersecurity without adding complexity to our operations. ActZero acts like an extension of our own team, providing quick responses and effective solutions to our cybersecurity challenges.
>
> *Will Miers, Director of Technology*

During a live phishing hack simulation by ActZero's team, they showcased the proactive Managed Detection and Response (MDR) defense and its ability to operate autonomously, integrating easily with the district's existing systems.

RESULTS

Since implementing ActZero, MSD Martinsville has seen significant improvements in cybersecurity management. Miers said Five Star used to manually block malicious websites, but now he relies on ActZero to notify him of and respond to suspicious threats. "I sleep a lot better now that I have ActZero. I know that threats can sit dormant for a while before I would see anything happening. My biggest fear was coming to work and overnight something happened wreaking havoc on our system," Miers explained. ActZero's monitoring and threat hunting have significantly strengthened MSD Martinsville's security, reducing cyber threats and allowing IT staff to focus on bigger projects.

Additionally, ActZero has improved how the district manages educational resources online, reducing risks from unverified websites. **"ActZero has changed the way we handle cybersecurity. It's efficient, effective, and gives us the peace of mind we need to focus on what really matters – educating our students,"** said Miers.

Although he uses a third-party service for network administration, ActZero would be particularly beneficial for districts with in-house network administrators, as it significantly reduces the workload. The partnership between MSD Martinsville and ActZero transformed the district into a model for other districts. With ActZero's support, MSD Martinsville now focuses on its primary mission of educating students, assured that their IT environment is protected by cutting-edge cybersecurity measures.