

Simplicity, Safety and Satisfaction: University of Wolverhampton Increases Efficiency and Effectiveness With Palo Alto Networks®

BACKGROUND

The University of Wolverhampton has a global online presence with users based in the UK and around the world. By placing its trust in Palo Alto Networks next-generation firewall solutions it keeps its business critical network safe, secure and accessible to 3,500 staff and 25,000 students.

STUDENTS LOCKED OUT

With a mixture of university-owned and personal devices belonging to thousands of individuals, the University of Wolverhampton's wireless network exists in a threat rich environment. It deployed a leading Network Access Control (NAC) package, supported by a range of documentation, staff training and support workshops for students. But this solution proved to be of limited value.

With little network visibility, IT Services had to demand a minimum safety requirement for students' personal devices—to ensure that they did not infect, or pick up infections from, the network. This caused problems as thousands of users, with varying degrees of technical and English language proficiency, grappled with a variety of security solutions.

It led to 20 to 30 students a month with legitimate access rights being locked out of the network, and crippling time demands on IT staff as they worked to resolve issues and deal with unhappy customers. Added to this, the NAC solution struggled to keep up with anti-virus updates, complicating the resolution process. Despite IT Services' best efforts, around 70 cases proved to be completely unresolvable.

RISK OF COPYRIGHT VIOLATION

In addition, P2P file sharing activity was becoming a major worry, with the very real possibility of copyright violations taking place across the network. As well as legal ramifications, the university is also part of the UK's research and education network, JANET, which demands strict copyright controls from its members. Tackling this threat drained 20 to 30 hours from the department every month.

With the existing solution nearing the end of its operational life, the University of Wolverhampton needed a cost effective firewall solution that granted appropriate access to authorised users easily and quickly. The university's Network Design Consultant, Max Caines explains: "Our requirements of a firewall solution were demanding, calling on granular visibility into the network to identify and deny malware, eliminate illegal file sharing, and provide all of this in a highly automated and user friendly solution. It was no easy task."



ORGANIZATION:

University of Wolverhampton

INDUSTRY:

Education

CHALLENGE:

- Existing security policies left 20 to 30 students a month incorrectly locked out of the network
- University was struggling to keep up with anti-virus updates, and around 70 threat cases proved to be completely unresolvable.
- 30 hours spent every month ensuring student work meets with JANET copyright standards

SOLUTION:

- University deployed a pair of Palo Alto Networks PA-5020 firewalls to streamline firewall management, utilising User-ID technology to view network bandwidth and applications consumed by each specific user

RESULTS:

- IT has removed the need for a minimum user security standard on its network—saving hundreds of man-hours in resolving access issues
- University has reported zero infections since deploying the next-generation firewall
- Firewall recognises patterns of activity consistent with illegal file sharing and suspends transfers before they happen—saving man-hours, removing the threat of legal action and meeting JANET's tough copyright standards



the network security company™

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Max Caines
Network Design Consultant
University of Wolverhampton

STREAMLINING FIREWALL MANAGEMENT

The University of Wolverhampton researched the latest firewall solutions, encompassing offerings from providers such as Cisco, Check Point, Juniper, and Ipoque—ultimately identifying Palo Alto Networks next-generation firewall as the ideal choice.

Deploying a pair of PA-5020s the university has completely streamlined firewall management, utilising its User-ID technology to view network bandwidth and applications consumed by each specific user. Implementation proved to be a painless experience, with in-depth support and advice from Palo Alto Networks and implementation partner, Teneo. Roll out took less than two weeks.

Max Caines explains: “Palo Alto Networks is in a different class from the competition, bringing both insight and the power to act on it. Unparalleled visibility allows us to detect and block threats in real time, whilst we can also drill down into the detail, even isolating a single infected PC on the network. It’s functionality we could only dream of before.”

HUNDREDS OF HOURS SAVED

Palo Alto Networks has transformed the ways in which users gain access to the network, and the ways that IT manages it.

Palo Alto Networks cast-iron security means that IT can be confident in the safety of the network, removing the need for a minimum user security standard—saving hundreds of man-hours in resolving access issues, and turning dissatisfied students into happy customers.

Prior to deploying the next-generation firewall, a number of viruses would infect the network every month, taking time to eradicate—today the infection rate has fallen to zero.

With granular network insight, false positives have also been virtually eliminated—saving staff from hunting down phantom infections. The firewall also recognises patterns of activity consistent with illegal file sharing and suspends transfers before they happen—saving man-hours, removing the threat of legal action, and meeting JANET’s tough copyright standards.

“As a department we’ve been able to move from fire-fighters to business enablers. It’s demonstrable improvement that’s having a positive impact on the reputation of the university generally and IT specifically. As well as being impressive on paper, Palo Alto Networks has kept its promises and exceeded our expectations.”

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BUSINESS ENABLERS

Finally, using Palo Alto Networks URL filtering, for the first time the university can now grant and deny varying levels of access to specific groups—helping IT to meet changing academic requirements.

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Max Caines concludes: “Time, and by extension, cost savings have been considerable. We have freed up significant man-hours by eliminating the need to chase down infections (real and imagined), combat copyright violations, and resolve access issues.”