

Online Higher Education Platform Guards Cloud Assets, Gains Competitive Edge

Open Universities Australia gains complete 24x7 cyber protection at a fraction of the cost, while freeing IT resources to focus on innovation.



Founded in 1993 and based in Melbourne, Open Universities Australia (OUA) is the country's leader in online higher education and has empowered over 300,000 students to achieve their study goals in higher education. OUA offers the choice of more than 160 online degrees from 10 leading Australian universities across seven fields of study — arts and humanities, business, education, health, IT, law, and science and engineering.

They are committed to providing not only a great user experience for their students, but also a secure platform that can protect student privacy. OUA know that any breach of the latter can undermine the trust in their platform. Fortunately, OUA hadn't yet suffered a major intrusion, but Rob Pickering, OUA's newly hired head of IT, wasn't about to let one happen on his watch.



Company:

Open Universities Australia

Industry: Higher Education

Employees: 300

Key Challenges

With the data privacy of thousands of students plus the reputation of its platform and partner universities at stake, Open Universities Australia (OUA) wanted to further strengthen its security posture as it drives toward achieving further growth.

Solution

OUA chose to outsource its cyber protections via a comprehensive suite of managed security services from Secureworks at nearly one-eighth the cost of building its own staff and capabilities, while keeping its IT resources focused on innovative DevOps activities.

Business Benefits

- Closed security gaps, enhanced protections
- Ensured brand reputation safety
- Kept DevOps resources driving innovation
- Streamlined regulatory compliance
- Raised security awareness and visibility

CASE STUDY

Guarding Brand Reputations

“Given our size and reputation as well as the name recognition of our partner universities, we offer a big target for threat actors.” That’s why he commissioned a third-party to conduct a thorough penetration test soon after he joined OUA. With nearly all of OUA’s applications residing in the Amazon Web Services (AWS) cloud, plus OUA’s own enterprise networks and endpoints and two small data centers, he wanted to know what vulnerabilities existed in OUA’s broad attack surface. Good thing he did. The penetration test found some gaps in OUA’s security, across the entirety of technology services. Pickering wasn’t surprised at the findings, but it provided him with an urgent and compelling rationale to get funding to close the gaps. “Clearly, we needed to remedy this situation quickly, but doing so quickly was beyond the resources we had available to us”, he says. “And ramping up our own cyber-security competencies to address our needs would cost us nearly eight times the expense of engaging a competent third-party partner.”

To find that partner, Pickering evaluated five security vendors, including several local ones and Secureworks, among the global candidates. “We chose Secureworks because of its willingness to help us manage the infrastructure we already had in place, which includes next-gen Palo Alto Firewalls and Imperva Web Application Firewalls, and because it was willing to tailor its approach to our requirements,” he says. “It amazed me how even the smaller, local security shops insisted on taking a cookie-cutter approach to our needs. Secureworks was just the opposite.”

Closing the Gaps

With the urgency and volume of the issues identified, Pickering relied on the expertise of Secureworks to prioritize closing them. To start, he engaged Secureworks Managed Security Services to provide an immediate and broad protective envelope of 24x7 monitoring, analytics, response and remediation capabilities –all leveraging the Secureworks Counter Threat Platform™. It combines elite threat intelligence, advanced detection technology and expert managed security analyst coverage to thwart threats ranging from common malware to sophisticated targeted cyberattacks against OUA’s defenses.

Pickering also turned the management of OUA’s firewalls over to Secureworks via its Managed Web Application Firewall and Advanced Managed Next-Generation Firewall (NGFW) services. The latter adds the dynamic blocklist functionality of the Secureworks Attacker Database to OUA’s Palo Alto Networks firewalls. By incorporating this threat intelligence into those devices, Secureworks provides OUA with an additional level of protection, which proactively blocks traffic to known malicious domain names and IP addresses. The database is constantly updated with intelligence drawn from analyzing millions of events each day from around the world.

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Secureworks Services

- [Advanced Endpoint Threat Protection](#)
- [Firewall Management](#)
- [Server Monitoring](#)
- [Infrastructure Monitoring](#)
- [AWS Managed Cloud Security](#)
- [Managed Web Application Firewall](#)

CASE STUDY

Protecting AWS Cloud Assets, Too

What's more, given that nearly all of OUA's intellectual property, both assets and applications, are hosted in the AWS cloud, Secureworks also protects those with its AWS Managed Cloud Security service. While AWS secures its cloud infrastructure and assets, it expects clients to secure from threats to their own assets and applications.

In this regard, OUA benefits from highly skilled security experts working from Secureworks Security Operations Center (SOC), where they monitor, correlate and analyze logs 24x7 from a variety of data sources to filter out false positives and to identify true security events. They investigate any anomalies and notify Pickering and his responsible team members immediately of their options should a response and remediation be needed.

Pickering finds the correlation of log data by Secureworks SOC experts especially valuable for deep insights and threat intelligence that his staff resources would be unable to provide. "For example," he says, "correlation of results from our penetration testing found a user who had gained server admin privileges but who had never before had them. This anomaly suggested the user's PC had been infected with an advanced persistent threat, which we were then able to find and neutralize before any damage was done."

Connecting with the Secureworks Client Portal and Mobile App

To stay abreast of OUA's threat landscape and activities, Pickering reports that his team uses The Secureworks Client Portal - Powered by the Counter Threat Platform™ (CTP) and mobile application extensively for downloading activity reports, threat intelligence updates, and to monitor events. "My team finds the Secureworks Portal user-friendly and useful to keep informed, while the mobile app helps alert them to security events and track open tickets," he says.

Competitive advantage is not often associated with managed security services, but Pickering insists it is one of the benefits of engaging Secureworks. "To turn aspects of our security over to Secureworks not only gets us a level of expertise, experience and threat intelligence and response that would cost many times more if we tried doing it ourselves, but also allows us to redirect those resources into our development efforts to improve our current customer experience and innovate to create new ones," he says. "We are always working to enhance our user experience and can't do that if a good portion of our people and financial resources are tied up monitoring firewalls and keeping the bad guys out. Our students have many options other than OUA in their pursuit of higher education, so we always need to sharpen our competitive edge, and with Secureworks safeguarding us, we're able to do just that."

CASE STUDY

Securing Endpoints Now

Pickering has been so pleased with Secureworks that he's expanding the scope of the engagement to include Advanced Endpoint Threat Prevention (AETP) Carbon Black. "This adds a layer of protection that really completes our defense-in-concert strategy," he says. "While it provides anti-virus protections, it also keeps us safe from much more sophisticated threats that can skirt those protections, like advanced persistent threats." AETP will help OUA in its future quest to gain certification with the ISO/IEC-27001 information security standards, the world's foremost. But, ahead of that, Secureworks has helped OUA in its efforts to comply with the Australian Privacy Act of 1988, which was recently amended with new, more rigorous requirements. Secureworks also helps OUA meet its PCI DSS credit card data privacy requirements. "Secureworks has really helped streamlined our compliance with the regulations we have to address," Pickering says. "It also has given us the foundation for gaining our ISO/IEC-27001 certification much more easily than if we were providing our own cyber security."

Earning OUA's Trust — Every Day

In all, Pickering considers Secureworks to be a trusted advisor for OUA. He appreciates the educational and informational webinars that are recorded so he and his staff can watch them when their busy schedules allow. In addition, they also find the monthly threat intelligence updates extremely informative, such as bulletins on the latest ransomware attack. Security awareness and visibility has grown considerably, since engaging Secureworks. "I don't use 'trusted advisor' lightly," he says, "but Secureworks goes above and beyond its scope of work every single day to earn its pay and our respect. I've been in IT a long time as a consultant and executive at many different places, and I don't see that kind of performance from vendors very often. They usually are very careful to stay within their scopes of work, but Secureworks exceeds theirs consistently. So, yes, I have to say, we consider Secureworks a trusted advisor and are quite happy to call them our partner."



Secureworks® (NASDAQ: SCWX) is a leading global cybersecurity company that protects organizations in the digitally connected world.

We combine visibility from thousands of customers, aggregate and analyze data from any source, anywhere, to prevent security breaches, detect malicious activity in real time, respond rapidly, and predict emerging threats. We offer our customers a cyber-defense that is Collectively Smarter. Exponentially Safer.™

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