Solent University Enhances Data Security in the Midst of Pandemic

"Once we'd identified the right solution, the project moved at a phenomenal pace. Rubrik and Softcat were both really hands on. Rubrik delivered clear analysis to illustrate how its solution would provide the security we needed."

Damien Sambrook
ICT Infrastructure Manager

Based in the heart of Southampton, Solent University produces students who are work-ready, world-ready and future-ready, transforming lives through real-world learning, delivering life-changing careers, and providing an outstanding student experience.

Exceptional staff, facilities, and a unique curriculum promote confidence, skills and knowledge, while their industrial partnerships offer professional insights and opportunities for knowledge exchange and research.

Solent University's IT estate has evolved in recent years to both keep pace with emerging teaching methods and technological developments. As is often the case, however, integrating new and old technologies has proven to be problematic.

"Since joining the team in 2013 I've seen many changes to the technologies we use and how we use them," said **Damien Sambrook, Solent University ICT Infrastructure Manager**. A recent migration to a Hyper V platform and ongoing plans to fully migrate to Windows 10 highlighted security issues that we needed to address."

"Despite a recent upgrade and extensive input from the incumbent vendors to try and improve how they integrated with the upgraded infrastructure, it became increasingly clear that we needed an alternative solution to our existing backup and disaster recovery technologies. We wanted a simpler, faster and more efficient solution."

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought things into even sharper focus. "As we approached the lockdown, we knew there would be increased demand for our services and a surge in threats from external sources. Analysts were predicting an acceleration in phishing attempts and ransomware attacks, and we also wanted to ensure that our systems would not expose us to risk of GDPR non-compliance. We wanted to move quickly to protect our vital IT assets with a robust, long-term fix," said Damien.

Battoning Down the Hatches

The existing method involved manually performing non-native backups of individual data sets. This increased the potential for errors as databases had to be individually copied to a second location and backed up separately. In addition to security concerns due to the potential for unsecured access to the information contained in the dataset, the process took between four to eight hours to complete — time that a relatively small IT team could have used much more effectively elsewhere.

"We were brought on board through our relationship with Softcat, who have had a great relationship with, and delivered many successful installations for, Solent University," said Dean Yates, GM UKI, Middle East and Africa at Rubrik. "It quickly became clear that our

INDUSTRY
Education

LOCATION
UK

PREVIOUS CHALLENGES

- Time-consuming and cumbersome legacy solution
- Labor-intensive backup process prone to increased risk of errors and security breaches

THE SOLUTION

- Adoption of Rubrik GO for automatic access to the latest technologies, future-proofing for cloud and lower upfront costs
- Built-in ransomware recovery assurance
- Automatic critical backup operations free up valuable IT team resources while eliminating the potential for errors, security breaches and downtime associated with manual operations
- Automatic cloud-native backups to encrypt data and produce immutable records that assist GDPR compliance

RESULTS

- 26 days of added productivity back to the organization
- 14% TCO reduction and savings of £70,000
- Future-proofed IT service provision and eliminated risk of GDPR non-compliance

PARTNER
Softcat

Cloud Data Management Platform, leveraging Microsoft Azure, was the right tool for the job. It was able to fulfil all of Solent's specific backup, disaster recovery and security requirements, ensure GDPR compliance, and deliver significant efficiency and cost savings now and in the future."storage was full, so these matters had to be resolved quickly. Our small IT team cannot afford to spend extra time on these kinds of tedious tasks," said Bataineh.

The Benefits

Critical backup operations are now performed automatically, helping to free up valuable IT team resources for other important tasks and eliminating the potential for errors, security breaches and downtime associated with manual operations. Performing cloud-native backups automatically encrypts all data and produces immutable records that assist GDPR compliance, as well as improving application uptime. As predicted, the COVID-19 pandemic generated a noticeable increase in phishing attempts and other cyber threats, yet the in-built ransomware recovery assurance element of Rubrik's solution ensures such risks are minimized.

Additionally, since deploying Rubrik, the university has benefited from:

Enhanced data security through automatic encryption, backup and DR functionalities alongside 26 days of added productivity back to the IT team: "Backups that could potentially take up to a day to achieve with our old system are now completed, secured and available to restore, if required within a couple of hours. It's given the team back half a day a week, allowing us to focus on other vital tasks and explore alternative ways of working."

Cost-effective, upfront financial model arranged alongside a 14% reduction in TCO and overall savings of £70,000: Rubrik offered an up-front financing deal projected over a five-year period that would deliver a 14% improvement in Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) in comparison to the old solution. When factored alongside the expected improvements in productivity and infrastructure rationalisation, Solent expects to achieve overall savings of around £70,000 over the lifetime of the agreement. Furthermore, the Rubrik GO solution that Solent has adopted will provide the university access to "evergreen hardware", via the product refreshes and predictable renewals made available within the subscription-based program.

Rapid identification of fit-for-purpose technologies: "Once we'd identified the right solution, the project moved at a phenomenal pace. Rubrik and Softcat were both really hands on. Rubrik delivered clear analysis to illustrate how its solution would provide the security we needed. That analysis contained everything we needed to know about the costs, benefits and support package available, as well as how the solution could be tweaked to perfectly match Solent's specific requirements."

Future-proofed IT service provision and eliminated risk of GDPR non-compliance: "As we emerge from lockdown and return to whatever the 'new normal' will be, we're convinced that the cloud-based elements of the solution have helped future-proof Solent's IT service provision. It's enabled us to extract more value out of our existing infrastructure, rationalise our data centre provision and leverage long-term productivity gains that will help a small team achieve even more with less as we continue our transformation journey."

Adoption of Rubrik GO, enabling automatic access to the latest technologies, future-proofing for cloud and lower upfront costs: "Throughout the project, we've had a great working relationship with both Rubrik and Softcat. All support requests are responded to quickly and efficiently, and we're confident that should we need them as we enter a challenging time for the sector, they'll be there. This pandemic has made every educational institution reassess how they do things and what teaching will look like going forward. While we can't completely eliminate risk in the university environment – there are just too many potential vectors for malicious cyber-attack – we now have totally resilient DR capabilities and the robust protection we need to securely provide IT services, however learning is delivered."

Rapid solution implementation: "By the time of implementation, the date for lockdown across the UK had been confirmed and we were concerned that this might delay the project. However, both teams pulled out all the stops to get the job done and it was completed within just two days. A Rubrik specialist was on site for two and a half hours and then all the critical configuration and optimisation work was completed remotely. Given the situation we were in, it was an incredible turnaround and shows what can be done even in the most extreme of situations. The solution was fully operational by mid-April!"