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Security made simple.

German International School Abu Dhabi Benefits from Comprehensive Sophos UTM Protection that Secures and Manages Student Web Access

Customer-at-a-Glance

German International School Abu Dhabi

Industry
Education

Number of Users
150 students and faculty

Sophos Solutions
Sophos UTM with Network Protection
and Web Protection

Website
www.gisad.ae

German International School Abu Dhabi is a private K-12 school located in the Zaab district of Abu Dhabi City. In a bid to make the web more accessible in its campus, the school recently started offering Wi-Fi access to both students and faculty; this is in addition to the school's existing wired network. Unfortunately, this led to the emergence of IT security challenges, primarily the lack of control over keeping inappropriate content out of the classroom and ensuring students don't waste time on sites they aren't supposed to be spending time on.

Karsten Bornkessel is the Head of IT at German International School in Abu Dhabi and keeping students' safe online falls under his purview. Sophos helped him secure the school's educational network by implementing strict controls for internet access. He says, "Sophos UTM offers comprehensive protection that is perfectly configured for the needs of educational institutes. It is future ready and includes the kind of capabilities that perfectly address the security challenges faced by our school."

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Head of IT Services
German International School, Abu Dhabi

Business Challenge

The IT team at German International School, Abu Dhabi manages the continuously growing IT infrastructure within their environment. This includes the existence of numerous IT devices used by students and the administration across various departments and also the web-based education platform. Additionally, the school allows students and staff to access the internet from personal devices. It was imperative that the IT team address the security implications of BYOD.

One of the primary concerns was to ensure the sanctity of the school's web based education platform used to deliver a highly interactive learning experience to students. Considering the internet is the backbone of the school's academic endeavour, Karsten and his team wanted to ensure, cyber threats did not interfere with academic output.

They were looking to address the following challenges:

A comprehensive network solution

Organizations across the globe are witnessing a rise in sophisticated targeted threats that seek to attack the network perimeter, enter the network and get access to sensitive data; educational institutes are not exempt from such attacks. In fact, they are like the proverbial low hanging

fruit for cyber attackers. Karsten and his team wanted a firewall that could not only protect the school's network from targeted external threats but also insider threats. Attackers typically target gullible users to compromise a network; this was a primary cause for concern for Karsten as students can be vulnerable to social engineering attacks and even email attacks.

They wanted a firewall solution to protect their network perimeter from both external threats and insider threats. Quite simply they were looking for a security solution that offered advanced threat protection.

Bandwidth Control

With schools adopting the use of computers and BYOD to impart education, there arises a need to increase bandwidth and ensure it's not abused. The IT security team was also looking for a solution that helps conserve internet bandwidth. There are two main reasons why bandwidth gets throttled in schools. The first is unrestricted access to the internet and the second is malware. The team wanted a unified security solution that addressed both these concerns.

Complete Web Protection

Keeping inappropriate content out of the classroom and still maintaining the balance between internet availability, protection and accountability to ensure complete integrity of the school's networked ecosystem was a key security requirement. Schools have a legal and moral responsibility to protect children from harmful online content and to protect staff and student personal data from theft or observation by unauthorized parties.

There is no doubt the use of the internet supports classroom instruction, but the web is also a repository of material that is both harmful and dangerous to children. The need was to create and implement policies that minimize legal concerns around inappropriate content and also ensured safe search on frequently used sites like Google, Yahoo, Bing, and YouTube for Schools.

Secure 'BYOD' internet access

The use of Wi-Fi presents a new dimension to the challenges associated with web protection. While the reason why the school chose to offer students Wi-Fi internet access is evident, Karsten still had the difficult job of ensuring traffic legitimacy, productive internet usage and ensuring Wi-Fi access was used for academic and productive purposes only.

The Technical Solution

Karsten and the school management decided that protecting and controlling web access and network protection were top priorities. The next step was to select a security solution that satisfied all their needs and requirements while being easy to deploy and manage. They spent countless hours assessing potential solutions and compared security products from various vendors before selecting Sophos UTM.

The Sophos deployment was the result of a successful free trial and convincing POC where Sophos UTM demonstrated its ability to address German International School's core concern - controlling student's internet access with a range of security features. Coupled with the ease of deployment and management, German International School, Abu Dhabi had no doubts that Sophos UTM was the right choice for them.

Sophos UTM SG 330 with Network and Web Protection

The Sophos SG solution offers robust next-gen firewall protection and the security features make it the right fit for German International School, Abu Dhabi. The Sophos SG appliance offers:

- **Network Firewall**
  Sophos makes defining and managing firewall rules simple, which makes it easy for IT security administrators to define reusable objects that can be updated across the system and all the rules that use them. Karsten can now shape or manage bandwidth by application, category, user or group or policy rule and even block traffic from unwanted countries or regions.

- **Advanced Threat Protection**
  Combines multiple technologies like IPS, Web, App control and selective sandbox analysis to provide a layered defense against APTs, command and control traffic and targeted attacks. It's as simple as flipping a switch and the school's IT security team can quickly identify infected hosts on the school's network before they become a problem.

- **Self-Service User Portal**
  Our secure self-service user portal helps users help themselves, reducing the workload on the IT security administrator's desk, making Karsten's life a whole lot easier. It provides personalized services like quarantine management, email sender whitelist controls, VPN client access, and allows designated admins to manage hotspot vouchers as well. And it supports our simple two-factor authentication to prevent unauthorized access.

- **URL Filtering Policies**

  Karsten can now select from over 35 million sites in 96 categories to create safe web policies to minimize legal concerns around students accessing inappropriate content and maximize academic productivity. He can set policies to block, warn or allow sites for individual students or groups of students, by quota time or time of day with limitless customization options all made intuitively simple.

- **SafeSearch, YouTube, and Google Apps**

  The UTM has got some features purpose-built for education environments like Safe Search for Google, Yahoo, and Bing, along with YouTube for schools support and anonymizing proxy blocking. We also offer the option to enforce allowed domains for Google Apps as part of any web policy.

- **Layer-7 Application Control**

  This allows Karsten to control application traffic on the school's network to effectively manage resource utilization and productivity. Our deep layer-7 inspection can identify over 1300 applications like Facebook, YouTube, IM clients, and much more. Karsten's team can easily block, allow, or shape network traffic proactively, in real-time using our dynamic flow monitor, or based on reporting trends.

Business Benefit

After deploying Sophos UTM, the German International School, Abu Dhabi has experienced a vast improvement in web access from the security perspective. Karsten and his team have made excellent use of the several security policies to ensure internet access is strictly regulated. Detailed logging and reporting gives Karsten and his team clear insights into usage, trends, and web activity. Overall, Sophos has helped the school proactively shape and reshape their policies, ensuring protection never interferes with student productivity. "Thanks to the simplicity, reliability and advanced nature of Sophos UTM, we could usher in a new era of secure digital learning in our classrooms for students and teachers alike" reveals Karsten Bornkessel.

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Karsten Bornkessel
Head of IT Services
German International School, Abu Dhabi

Start your free trial of Sophos UTM today.

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