SOPHOS

CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

Saint Michael's College in Burlington, Vermont is a liberal arts college with roughly 2,000 students and 148 full-time faculty members. The IT department has deployed simple-to-manage Sophos Central for next-generation protection across its entire infrastructure, which includes 1,200 endpoints, 100 servers, and 120 virtual machines. Sophos Central provides up-to-date set-and-forget security and has significantly lightened the load on the college IT staff so that they can focus on important tasks.

SAINT MICHAEL'S COLLEGE FOUNDED 1904

Customer-at-a-Glance

Saint Michael's College
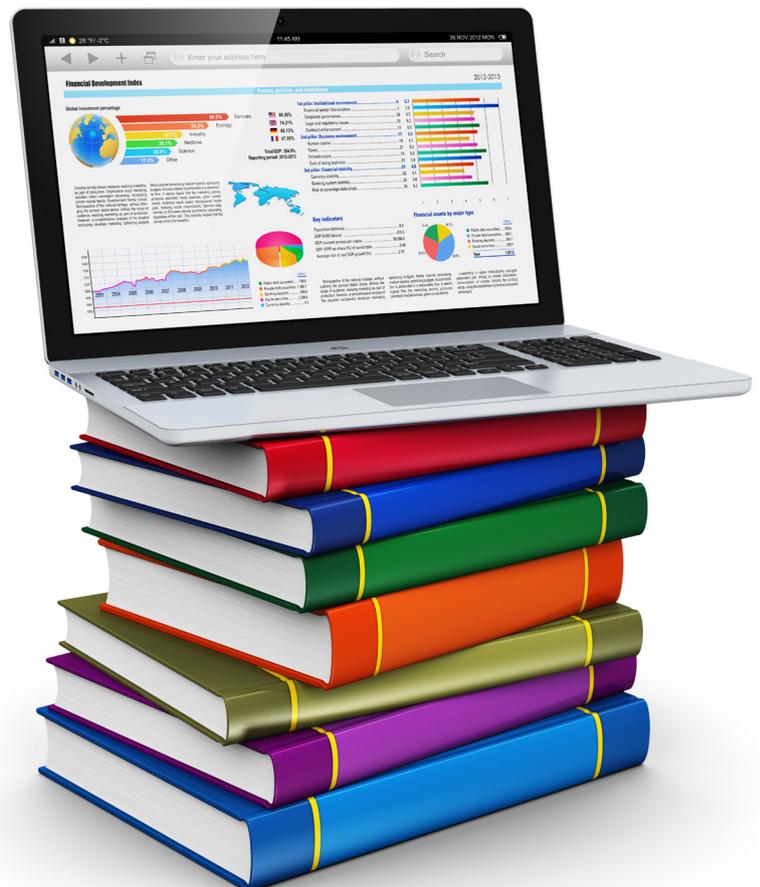One Winooski Park
Colchester, VT 05439
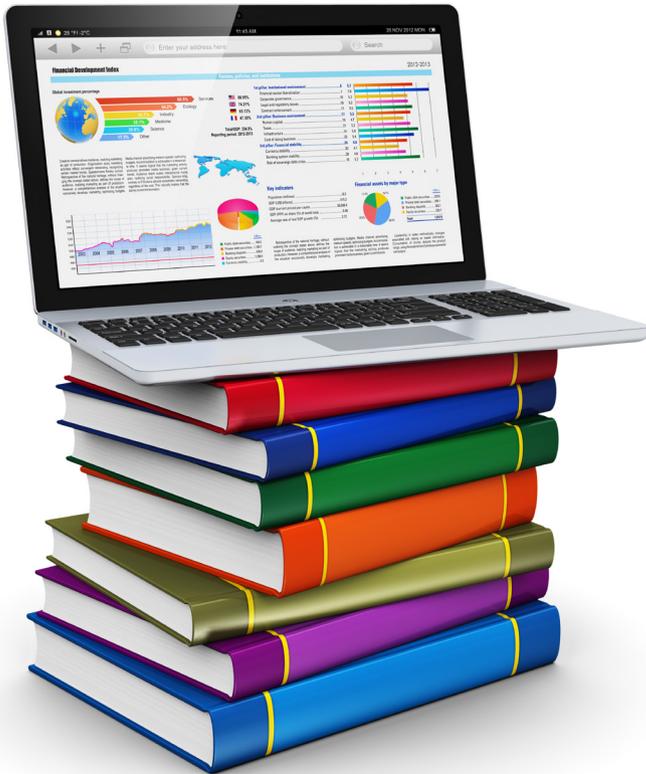
Website
https://www.smcvt.edu

Industry
Higher education

Number of Users
148 full-time faculty members
2,000 undergraduate students

Sophos Solutions
Sophos Central
Sophos Central Server Protection Advanced

Sophos Customer
Since 2015

Saint Michael's College in Burlington, Vermont is a selective private liberal arts college with more than 2,000 students and nearly 148 full-time faculty members. *U.S. News and World Report 2015* calls Saint Michael's College, one of the "best and most interesting colleges" in the country. Introduced to Sophos by its trusted reseller, Towerwall, Saint Michael's College recently selected Sophos Central as its primary security solution for its entire infrastructure based on its stability, quality, reliability, and ease of use.

'We made a sound choice with Sophos and were careful to select the right solution. Luckily, there's not too much that keeps me up at night anymore. I feel that we're doing exceptionally well, thanks to Towerwall and Sophos.'

Shawn Umansky
Network Engineer
Saint Michael's College

Business Challenge

Shawn Umansky, network engineer at Saint Michael's College, whose Information Technology department is comprised of 23 employees, is the "hub of the campus," overseeing everything from day-to-day operations in the data center to a server farm of 100 virtual machines to ordering furniture for classroom renovations. "Our department, with its knack for effective project management, is involved in countless projects in which more traditional IT departments aren't involved," explains Umansky. "We're the 'jacks of all trades.' Since technology is linked with just about everything you can think of here, our team is constantly busy." Umansky himself, who has been at Saint Michael's College for nearly a decade, wears multiple hats and likens himself to the 'Swiss army knife' of IT. And when it comes to information security, he runs the show.

With almost a decade of IT experience on campus, Umansky has kept a close eye on both the evolution of the threat landscape and, in parallel, the evolution of security vendors and their solutions. After deploying a number of different security solutions over the years, he was ready for a change. Umansky embarked on a mission to find a hands-off security solution that could be easily maintained, managed, and updated. He needed a reliable and seamless solution that he could get into production quickly and that would require minimal oversight.

In the past, Umansky and his team had used eTrust, Trend Micro, and Microsoft Forefront. Unfortunately, Umansky and his team were dissatisfied with the malware catch rate of some of the earlier products. At a previous point in time, the team decided to deploy Trend Micro on an internal server. The product eventually became stagnant and outdated, and, as a result, was not a fit for the organization. "We realized that our Trend Micro solution was sorely out of date and that it would be a huge chore to make it more current," reveals Umansky. "Maintenance definitely required an enterprise-level management team, and we simply did not have the time to invest in that activity."

While the Trend Micro products were still in operation, Umansky and his team shifted to Microsoft Forefront as a viable solution for endpoints across campus. Since Saint Michael's College already had Microsoft licensing for its PCs, Forefront was an attractive no-cost alternative. It did the job adequately, but, because it was a standalone product, it lacked centralized management and robust features Umansky and the team preferred. When Microsoft announced that Forefront would be discontinued, Umansky felt that the time was ripe for a major transformation in how Saint Michael's College approached security.

"We were looking for a product that we could simply plug into our environment and one that we would not have to worry about. What we were after is a product that we could implement and use with minimal effort, time investment, and performance impact, but that could still perform up to our standards," clarifies Umansky.

The Elegant Simplicity of Sophos Central

Umansky and his team sought the advice of the college's long-time trusted vendor and Sophos reseller, Towerwall, a Sophos Platinum partner with a 22-year track record of providing advanced information security solutions and services to hundreds of companies. "Towerwall does an exceptional job of building trust with its customers and offering honest advice," expresses Umansky.

Sophos was the first security provider in Towerwall's portfolio and is the reseller's leading vendor. "We've recommended Sophos to other customers in the education sector, and our clients have had great success with these cutting-edge products. Our customers appreciate that Sophos offers a portfolio of solutions that can scale with the organization," says Towerwall

CEO Michelle Drolet. "As a partner, we recognize Sophos' 'channel first' strategy. Sophos is a company that understands how to prioritize its partners and makes the effort to collaborate closely with them."

Towerwall highly recommended Sophos Central for its simplicity, easy deployment, and manageability. Sophos Central is an industry-leading solution that fully integrates advanced endpoint, mobile, server, and web security — all managed by a single, cloud-based management console — and no hardware required, which was a big plus for Umansky. Saint Michael's College now has 1,200 licenses of Sophos Central and uses the service on virtually every device it owns on campus — servers, laptops, desktops, Macs, and virtual desktop images.

The robust reporting and centralized management capabilities of Sophos Central are positives for Umansky. The web-based management console allows him to monitor the security posture of the entire campus infrastructure through a single pane of glass. Color-coded indicators provide details on each device's status along with recommended actions. In addition, he can easily set and enforce policies for all devices.

The college also acquired 150 licenses of Sophos Central Server Protection Advanced, a cloud-based server security solution with advanced anti-malware, application whitelisting, and host intrusion prevention. This integrated, high-performance solution protects the college's mission-critical servers and virtual environment.

"It's a win-win all the way around. Because I am engaged in so many tasks and projects on any given day, if I can offload a certain percentage of those activities, that's extremely attractive to me. With Sophos Central in place, managing the on-premises server is off my plate. For us, it's a huge advantage to have a respected company like Sophos managing the backend. Ultimately, it's not so much a time saver as it is avoidance of a problem," says Umansky. "We made a sound choice with Sophos and were careful to select the right solution. Luckily, there's not too much that keeps me up at night anymore. I feel that we're doing exceptionally well, thanks to Towerwall and Sophos."

Umansky has also recommended Sophos Central to his peers and colleagues at other universities. "The two things I am most impressed with are the simplicity of management and the excellence of the reporting capabilities," declares Umansky.

'The core concerns I had in the past — like the need for stability, reliability and performance — are even more crucial than ever before. I believe that Sophos addresses these concerns better than any other solution we've had to date.'

Shawn Umansky
Network Engineer
Saint Michael's College

High Stakes in a Dynamic Threat Environment

Since Umansky joined Saint Michael's College, he's watched both campus IT requirements and the threat environment undergo changes. "When I first started at the college, I was a desktop developer and spent my time building desktop images, which included antivirus. But instead of just being concerned about rolling out a stable image to the classroom computers, I now have organization-wide responsibility for security, so the stakes are much higher. The core concerns I had in the past — like the need for stability, reliability, and performance — are even more crucial than ever before. I believe that Sophos addresses these concerns better than any other solution we've had to date."

Spear Phishing Is a Dominant Concern

As Umansky points out, "It's an interesting time to be in IT security." One of the primary threats faced by Saint Michael's College lately is spear-phishing attacks. Spear phishing uses social engineering to get users to open and engage with emails that contain infected attachments and/or links to malicious websites. These emails, which target a small, selected population, are carefully written to look as if they come from a trusted sender on a relevant topic. The goal of spear-phishing emails is to gain access to the network and appropriate valuable data.

Like most IT professionals, Umansky is well aware that the web is the number one source of threats. He has spent time monitoring the ebb and flow of these threats over the years and notes that, in the past, Saint Michael's College was hit as many as 10 times a week, generally over a duration of anywhere from a week to a month. "Spear phishing is an ongoing issue, because the means by which the bad guys attempt to get our data is constantly changing. That definitely keeps us on our toes," explains Umansky. "Fortunately, we now have several effective procedures. Now we can quickly remediate the problem when an account is compromised, so we're seeing fewer incidents. I frankly think we're not such an attractive target now because the hackers are getting discouraged—they know that they can no longer be as successful as they once were." Sophos Central, with its enterprise-grade web protection capabilities, is now safeguarding users against malicious websites that they may unwittingly click on.

Umansky also believes that an important aspect of combating spear phishing is changing user behavior through education. To help college employees stay vigilant and learn to distinguish between legitimate links from malicious ones, he has launched multiple training initiatives and uses a variety of methods — including email communiqués, workshops, and seminars — to reach as broad a population as possible.

Start your free trial of Sophos Central today.

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