CASE STUDY

River Island and KnowBe4 Make Security A Business Driver

When UK residents think of River Island, several descriptors come to mind: fashion, quality, inclusivity, family. That's because the retailer, which was started in 1948 by the Lewis family, has grown into an icon of British high street.

With 250 stores across the UK, a significant online presence, and a rabid customer base, River Island designs trendy yet high-quality fashion pieces inhouse as it continues to expand internationally. Still owned 100 percent by the Lewis family, River Island is a key fashion player on a global stage but keeps its internal slogan focused: this is family.

As such, Sunil Patel, River Island's information security officer, feels a strong sense of responsibility to protect River Island from growing cyber threats. Patel came to River Island in 2017 as the company's first ever information security (InfoSec) professional and immediately knew two things needed to happen. River Island needed to put a stronger focus on cybersecurity while educating a young and vibrant workforce to identify simple email threats.

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"You don't have to be an InfoSec professional to know that phishing is a real threat. It is still one of the most common human compromise methods and it happens all the time," Patel says. "I wanted to equip our employees with the knowledge to be able to spot this type of threat with the aim to protect our organization, data, services and reputation."

KnowBe4 Provides Empirical Evidence

By chance, as Patel was considering how to reduce River Island's phishing probability, he received a cold call from a KnowBe4 sales associate. A relationship started to form, and it was clear KnowBe4 recognized just how at-risk retail organizations are to phishing scams. Patel was new to the organization and understood he would need to persuade senior leadership to invest budget into a new type of cybersecurity initiative.

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"While we highly valued protecting both corporate and customer data, retail margins are razor thin, so increasing budgets of any kind requires empirical evidence," Patel says.

KnowBe4 understood the need for data to prove Patel's case and worked with him to implement a 30-day trial of the company's security awareness training and simulated phishing platform. Patel and his team used KnowBe4's Active Directory integration to quickly and easily identify 1,800 employees to receive sample phishing tests.

"KnowBe4 is the easiest platform to use. We were up and running in an hour, setting up 10 very basic phishing templates that we thought were obvious and running them for 30 days," Patel says. "A staggering 33% of employees clicked on that first phishing test."

With empirical evidence that River Island had a security awareness problem, Patel was able to make the case.

"I stood up in a meeting of about 150 tech employees and showed the phishing emails," Patel says. "When I asked if anyone recognized them, there was an audible gasp. I was able to show how critical it was for KnowBe4 to help us."

Phish-prone Percentage™ Drove Other Security Changes

After showing senior leadership that nearly 600 employees had clicked on sample phishing tests, it was easy for Patel to justify the investment in KnowBe4. The strong response from the tech team signaled something else to Patel: that his push to enable multifactor authentication (MFA) within the company could be successful.

"There was resistance to MFA because it adds an extra step and has a cost associated with it. KnowBe4 illustrated our vulnerability to phishing, which helped our leadership take security even more seriously," Patel says. "Because of KnowBe4, I was able to enable MFA and get our leadership to understand the business value of security awareness. KnowBe4's impact on River Island was massive. It helped me show that security is not a cost center, but a business driver."

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Today Patel and his team send out phishing tests every two weeks to 2,000 River Island employees.

"We've reduced our Phish-prone Percentage to 4.9%, so we have employed the AI component of KnowBe4 to make the phishing tests progressively harder," Patel says.

Patel and his team have started to test specific groups that have access to more sensitive data – HR, finance, legal, and personal assistants to the Lewis family members – to ensure they keep their skills sharp.

Looking to the Future

The relationship between River Island and KnowBe4 continues to evolve. The growth River Island employees have shown in spotting phishing emails has been a kind of on-the-job training. Until now, Patel has only been testing employees, not formally training them.

"We have an internal platform for delivering all trainings, but it's in my 2023 security strategy to

leverage the security awareness training capability of the KnowBe4 platform where possible" Patel says.

"It's critical that [employees] understand cyber risk and how to protect themselves – both personally and professionally. KnowBe4 is helping us achieve that."

Patel is working to transition policy compliance to the KnowBe4 platform, too. By doing so, all River Island policies would live on the KnowBe4 platform, which would keep track of when employees are notified of a policy and when they agree to it.

He envisions that on their first day of work, new employees would get their laptop, go into KnowBe4 and access all corporate policies – things like the employee handbook, acceptable use, social media, safety policies.

"From a compliance standpoint, this would be ideal," Patel says. "We could keep record of all policies in the KnowBe4 dashboard and even deliver initial security awareness training modules on the first day of work."

Patel is aware, too, that the work he and his team are doing with KnowBe4 is making a difference in the lives of digital natives.

"KnowBe4 is helping us arm our employees with knowledge for the future. We have a very young workforce, most of whom are digital natives and are used to living their lives online," Patel says. "It's critical that they understand cyber risk and know how to protect themselves – both personally and professionally. KnowBe4 is helping us achieve that."

Success by Numbers:

- Phishing tests every two weeks to more than 2,000 employees
- Decreased company Phish-prone Percentage from 33% to 4.9%
- Implemented multi-factor authentication across the organization
- Improved relations between employees and InfoSec team