

Case Study

South Ayrshire Council Uses KnowBe4 Prevent and Defend to Enhance Security Awareness



Industry

Government

Location

Scotland

Challenge

Reduce network security complexity and mitigate the risk of accidental breaches of sensitive data

Reducing Network Security Complexity

As one of 32 councils in Scotland, South Ayrshire Council provides services to the citizens, residents and businesses that call Ayrshire home. And like other government agencies, South Ayrshire Council regularly deals with sensitive personal and financial information.

The Council's initial platform for ensuring secure communications was to secure a network completely separate from its corporate network. "To handle secure transactions and communication, we had a 'secure enclave' of about 250 machines running our public service network services. But prior to our existing ICT Team's commitment to change, the corporate network didn't receive the same level of attention to security," says Anne Yeo, Senior ICT Security Analyst at South Ayrshire Council.

At a Glance

- ▶ User reporting of suspicious emails increased across a 1,000-user network
- ▶ Entire network security infrastructure improved to a higher standard
- ▶ Reduction in cost compared to previous approach



“I believe we were the only organization in Scotland that approached it like this; all other local authorities ran everything through their corporate networks. It became increasingly challenging because the people who used the secure network to communicate with other local authorities had to have two separate devices, logins, and email addresses.” Yeo says. “Maintaining and upgrading these devices was expensive — even though it was a relatively small network compared to our larger corporate network, there was a lot of expenditure associated with servicing that for 300 people.”

“People were willing to accept [the new approach]. There were initial concerns about how challenging it would be to use and how it would impact sending emails, but people have found it straightforward to use as part of their daily work.”

Anne Yeo
Senior ICT Security Analyst, South Ayrshire Council

Additionally, the Council’s ICT team wanted to change how the organization handled security, increasing user awareness. “We purchased an email phishing simulation tool and started running simulations. We had some initial success but often found that people shared information about the simulation. When we ran simulations, about half the people knew it was a simulation before they opened the email, which skewed our results. We could tell some people learned to slow down and pay closer attention to the email, but many people didn’t change their behavior. We realized we needed something else to help empower our employees to make informed email decisions,” Yeo says.

The Council’s data governance team also had its own security concerns, namely, preventing accidental data breaches. “Our information governance and privacy are handled by a separate office outside the ICT team — and our data governance team was very conscious about needing a product that provided protection against people mistakenly sending information out. Previously, they had no idea how often data breaches happened due to internal human errors. We know that data breaches are historically underreported — people are embarrassed and don’t want to get into trouble for a mistake they’ve made that could’ve led to a potentially bad situation,” she says.

Implementing Defend and Prevent

South Ayrshire Council's ICT team reviewed its security options and looked closely at two KnowBe4 offerings: KnowBe4 Prevent to mitigate against outbound data loss and KnowBe4 Defend to protect against inbound phishing threats. "We knew we needed to move away from the security enclave and secure our whole corporate network. We began looking for alternatives to support this transition, and KnowBe4 Prevent had already come to our attention when we'd been looking for products to protect our employees who needed to share highly sensitive information with external organizations. And my manager, Stewart McCall, saw KnowBe4 Defend in a call and thought its banners and notifications would help our staff," Yeo says.

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Anne Yeo

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Adoption across the organization went smoothly. "People were willing to accept [the new approach]. There were initial concerns about how challenging it would be to use and how it would impact sending emails, but people have found it straightforward to use as part of their daily work. And from a management standpoint, Defend is easy for the ICT team to administer and maintain," Yeo says.

User feedback on KnowBe4 has been overwhelmingly positive. "We want to find the balance between introducing friction into our employee's daily routines and reducing risk. One of the key things we've done is to completely block any email links that

Defend finds suspicious. We found that some people were still clicking through links, even though Defend displayed a red banner that indicated that the email was almost certainly phishing. Defend allows us to ensure that users cannot click through those links," she says.

Reducing Complexity, Improving Security Awareness

KnowBe4 boosted the Council's security across the organization while reducing complexity and costs. "We have mandated requirements to provide a certain level of security for our users who are accessing and sharing sensitive information," Yeo says. "But our security enclave approach came with significant complexity and costs. By bringing our corporate network up to a higher security standard with KnowBe4, the whole organization benefits. And by removing the costs associated with maintaining a security enclave, we could redirect the budget to cover security for the entire organization."

KnowBe4 has also helped the Council's employees become more security conscious. "We do annual training to meet our compliance requirements and count on Defend and Prevent to help shift user behavior. More than 1,000 users across our network use [the tools], including the people in job roles that share sensitive personal or financial data with external clients — and the number of times users alert us to potentially suspicious emails has increased," Yeo says. "And KnowBe4 has helped identify situations that our data governance team needs to look at more closely. KnowBe4's analytics lets us see which threats are being blocked and which employees need additional information and training, allowing our data governance team to follow up with people directly. We've seen signs that things are getting better."

KnowBe4 has allowed South Ayrshire Council to show other Councils and partner organizations that it takes data security seriously. "KnowBe4 has allowed us to demonstrate to peers that our network security has changed and improved," Yeo says.



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