School aids pupils' learning with safe internet access

St Dominic's School for Girls secures its network, delivering safe internet access to all staff and pupils—and a proactive approach to IT support.

Business need

With an outdated IT infrastructure, the school was struggling to meet the growing demand for technology. An IT refresh was required and security needed to be tightened.

Solution

Using SonicWall next-generation firewall, the school was able to ensure it meets the staff and pupils' growing internet needs, both for today and the future.

Benefits

- Protected the school's network and enabled safe internet access on multiple devices
- Increased productivity due to ease of use
- Delivered time savings enabling proactive approach to IT support
- Provided a future-proof easily scalable approach to network and internet security

Solutions at a glance

- Network Security

"SonicWall NGFW has lived up to its promises. We feel very well protected and have not experienced any security breaches or content filtering issues."

-Harry van der Burgt, IT Manager St Dominic's School for Girls

St Dominic's School for Girls is a faith-based private school close to the international airport in Johannesburg, South Africa. The school serves nearly 1,100 pupils, from the ages of 5 to 18, and employs 70 teachers, 15 administrative staff and two full-time IT support staff. As part of an IT update, SonicWall was chosen to secure its new network and provide safe internet access to all staff and pupils.

Prior to 2012, the school's IT infrastructure was managed on a "fix when broken" basis, and as a result, had grown haphazardly into an IT maze filled with loopholes and bottlenecks. With limited internet access for the staff alone, the existing scenario was barely operational and not easy for the IT support staff to manage. As a consequence, the IT landscape was difficult to develop into something that would benefit the pupils' learning.

A secure future-proof environment was needed

However, the growing demand for technology allowed the school to make a strategic decision to commit to replacing its IT infrastructure. An internal team was formed to develop a technology vision in line with the overall spirit of the school that the learners would benefit from. The first phase was to create a solid foundation of technology that would last for 15 to 20 years, onto which other technology could be easily added and developed as needed.

St Dominic's aim was to provide all staff and students (1,200 users in total) with safe and adequate daily internet access from their own devices, potentially more than one device per user, i.e. cell phone, laptop, tablet. Naturally, IT security was of paramount importance for the school in order to protect its pupils and ensure safe internet access. Content filtering was needed to ensure the pupils were only able to access safe websites. The school also needed to secure its network to protect its own data – which included confidential student records, student grades, reports, exam papers, teachers'

lesson plans and students' work – from security breaches.

New IT platform with next-generation firewall

St Dominic's considered a number of partners to assist with its technology update project, and selected Dial a Nerd, a South African technology support company, dedicated to both businesses and educational institutions. "We choose Dial a Nerd because of their previous experience with schools, and because we liked their approach," explains Harry van der Burgt, IT manager at St Dominic's School for Girls. "They proposed a solid, future-proof solution with SonicWall next-generation firewalls that we felt very comfortable with."

The security solution included SonicWall NSA 4600. The Network Security Appliance (NSA) firewalls offer protection, performance and scalability ideal for small- to medium-sized businesses. A suite of tools, including intrusion prevention, gateway antivirus, and anti-spyware plus application intelligence and control, offer granular control through application blocking, bandwidth management and more. Additional security and connectivity capabilities, such as IPSec VPN, SSL VPN, content filtering, anti-spam and enforced client antivirus, make the NSA Series a comprehensive and powerful all-in-one security solution.

SonicPoint N2 wireless access points were also included in the solution to combine wireless technology to the firewall solution. With dual radios, six external removable antennas, 802.11n

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Products & Services

Hardware

SonicWall NSA 4600 next generation firewall

SonicPoint N2 wireless access points

Software

SonicWall Analyzer

SONICWALL™

support and the ability to receive power through an 802.3at PoE Injector, the SonicPoint N2 was a cost-effective option for wireless LAN connectivity.

In addition, the school also selected SonicWall Analyzer to provide centralised visualisation, analytics and reporting. It streamlines and summarises web traffic and network data, to deliver near real-time analysis of incoming syslog messages, with immediate compliance and multi-threat reporting.

New cabling, network, servers, laptops and docking stations

Work started on the implementation of the school's new IT infrastructure which included replacing copper cabling and introducing a fibre backbone into each of the school buildings. Within a couple of months, a new network was operational with more than 550 network points and Dell PowerEdge Servers (R720 and R320). Dell Latitude laptops and Dell E-Port docking stations were installed in parallel to enable all teachers to make immediate use of the new environment throughout 65 classrooms. The SonicWall solutions were deployed, and St Dominic's is currently rolling out technology into the hands of the students.

Assurance of network security and safe internet access

St Dominic's School now has the assurance of its network being fully protected, and the zoning capabilities offered by SonicWall will enable the school to separate the staff and students' internet access." SonicWall has lived up to its promises," says van der Burgt. "We feel very well

protected and have not experienced any security breaches or content filtering issues."

The school is also very satisfied with its internet access. "The combination of the firewall and the SonicPoints provides us with safe and secure wireless capabilities throughout the school," notes van der Burgt.

Ease of use drives efficient working

While Dial a Nerd assisted with implementation and continues to provide help desk support, the school uses SonicWall on a day-to-day basis. "SonicWall is very straightforward to use and enables us to control our entire network at a granular level from one central web-based console," enthuses van der Burgt. "We can obtain statistics and set up multiple content filters really easily. Plus, the dashboard is amazing, enabling us to see all our network traffic on one screen. As a result, we are working far more efficiently."

Dial a Nerd echoes SonicWall's usability. "It can be difficult keeping up-to-date with other vendors' solutions – lots of thought and planning is often required with new releases," says Neil Edmonds, project manager at Dial a Nerd. "SonicWall is more intuitive and can be customised really simply; even the advanced features are easy to use. This speeds up implementation and increases productivity."

Proactive approach as a result of time savings

St Dominic's School has experienced time savings, and as a result can now

undertake proactive value-added IT activities. "To date, we have quadrupled the number of users, but we no longer spend any time firefighting viruses, bottlenecks and internet access issues," explains van der Burgt. "Our new IT environment, with SonicWall at its heart, has freed up our time. We can now undertake preventative measures, such as laptop health checks, and we have time to develop new systems."

In terms of future-proofing its solution, St Dominic's School is very happy with its new next-generation firewall. "We are confident that SonicWall will continue to serve us well for many years as we have not reached anywhere close to its maximum capacity," notes van der Burgt.

Summing up, van der Burgt says the following: "We have a system that works, and which makes the teachers happy. This is so important for the atmosphere within the school. SonicWall has delivered technology that works for us, not the other way around!"

Dial a Nerd
SIMPLIFYING TECHNOLOGY

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