



The Southport School fortifies data security with Cohesity



INDUSTRY
Education

USE CASE
Backup as a Service, Disaster Recovery

COHESITY SOLUTIONS
DataProtect delivered as a service

WORKLOADS
Microsoft 365 (M365) - Teams, SharePoint, Exchange Online

The Southport School (TSS) backed up its student, faculty, and administrative M365 data using Veeam on-premises. The legacy solution worked adequately and was easy to use, but the on-prem environment required a significant investment in data center storage, was time-consuming to manage, and offered only a basic level of security functionality for the school's critical data.

In 2022, TSS decided to use Cohesity DataProtect delivered as a service to back up its M365 mailboxes, creating a cloud-to-cloud isolated copy of data off of the Microsoft Cloud. By moving its backups to the Cohesity Cloud Services, hosted in AWS, TSS reduced its reliance on expensive on-prem storage for its M365 backups, while gaining assurance that the school's valuable data was even more secure. The Cohesity solution also enabled TSS to reduce data backup management tasks, slash the time needed to restore user mailboxes from days to just minutes, and more easily qualify for cybersecurity insurance.

Challenges

Supporting the technology demands of 1,680 students and more than 300 faculty and staff is no small job for The Southport School's IT professionals. Richard Humphreys, IT Manager for TSS, is responsible for ensuring the integrity and security of multiple terabytes of critical data stored on the school's on-prem servers and in the cloud, as well as protecting all confidential data from malware and ransomware attacks.

Key Benefits

- Strengthened data security and improved ransomware protection
- Reduced data recovery time from days to minutes
- Facilitated cybersecurity insurance renewals
- Eliminated reliance on costly, on-prem storage

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“Not only did Cohesity enable us to safeguard our Exchange environment and move data management to the cloud, but we also easily meet the requirements for cybersecurity insurance. We are now able to protect and recover our entire M365 environment, reduce our reliance on costly storage, and enhance our cyber resiliency.”

– Richard Humphreys, IT Manager, The Southport School

“There are many significant security challenges relevant to the education industry today, and many schools in our region have been recent targets of ransomware,” explained Humphreys. “We are faced with the ever-increasing sophistication and complexity of threats to our data, as well as the need to adhere to all of the regulatory requirements relevant to private schools. We are confident that we can surmount all of these challenges as long as we continue to invest in the best data protection and security technologies available in the market.”

TSS used M365 to store its student, faculty, and administrative user mailboxes in the cloud. They are leveraging Veeam to back up the M365 data to on-prem storage. “We use HPE SimpliVity to create snapshots of our virtual machines. SimpliVity provides bandwidth-efficient replication to ensure data integrity and availability. It’s a very efficient solution, reducing our storage and bandwidth requirements because of its inline deduplication and compression.”

TSS relied on the Veeam and HPE SimpliVity backups for the past five years. “That combined solution worked well for the small number of mailboxes we had moved to M365, but as we increased our cloud adoption, the time it took to bring data back down on-prem became excessive,” noted Humphreys. “Recoveries were slow and cumbersome with the way our environment was set up.”

Humphreys wanted to find a better data protection solution that would enable him to move the remainder of the school’s student and staff mailboxes to M365 and restore them quickly. “From a governance perspective, we need to make sure we’re backing up all of our data and files, not just a subset of that valuable data,” he explained. “Many organizations fall into the trap of thinking the Microsoft Cloud will take care of all of their backup needs and there’s nothing left to worry about, but that’s simply not the case. If you look at the shared responsibility model of data security, your data is still your responsibility. It’s essential to have an additional backup set of all of your data, especially for schools like ours where there are so many governance rules and regulations we must adhere to.”

Solution

When it came time to refresh the existing backup infrastructure last year, Humphreys decided to look at some of the newer data protection solutions on the market. “We had to decide if we wanted to start leveraging M365 more—which made sense for us financially, because we already had the investment in Microsoft and weren’t utilizing it to its full potential—or the alternative of investing in more costly on-prem Veeam storage again. We decided to move more of our data to the Microsoft Cloud.”

After evaluating several data protection solutions, Humphreys concluded that Cohesity DataProtect delivered as a service, a fully-managed backup as a service solution (BaaS), provided the best way for TSS to protect the school’s M365 data. “Cohesity had all of the critical elements we were looking for in a cloud backup service,” he said. “We were initially looking at just using Cohesity on-prem for its ease of use for recovery, but after talking to the Cohesity sales team, we decided to back up all of our M365 mailboxes using the Cohesity BaaS. Cohesity DataProtect as a service would enable us to simplify management of all of our backups and allow us to easily scale the environment to meet demand.”

Results

Once the Cohesity backups were in place, Humphreys gained the confidence to move all of the school’s remaining mailboxes to the Microsoft Cloud. “With Cohesity, we are no longer solely relying on the backup and retention policies within M365, we have an additional backup solution that we can easily restore from,” Humphreys shared. “The Veeam backups are highly deduplicated, so it takes a considerable amount of time to uncompress those archives. Recovering is much faster on Cohesity since we’re essentially running a live copy of our data. We can now retrieve mailboxes or files in minutes instead of days. Backup and recovery testing is also much easier and faster on Cohesity.”

Helios, Cohesity’s SaaS-based user interface with built-in machine-learning intelligence, enables TSS to efficiently manage all of its cloud instances from one intuitive dashboard. “Helios has an excellent Google-like search capability,” explained Humphreys. “The ease of use when browsing through the mailboxes is quite impressive. Cohesity is essentially a ‘set it and forget it’ solution.”

Cohesity made cybersecurity insurance renewals much easier for TSS. “When I first took out cybersecurity insurance several years ago, the process was really quite simple,” said Humphreys. “We just signed up for the insurance and paid the premiums. Now we have to complete a very detailed questionnaire that asks what kind of password policies we have, what multi-factor authentication methods we use, what our backup solutions are, how often we back everything up, if we test our backups regularly, and more. I’m not convinced we could meet the minimum requirements for cybersecurity insurance anymore if we didn’t have Cohesity in place.”

In addition to all of its advanced data management and protection features, Cohesity’s licensing model was very attractive to Humphreys. “Cohesity’s licensing is based on the number of mailboxes we need to protect, but it also allows us to ingest an unlimited amount of OneDrive and SharePoint data at no extra cost. We have 30 TB of unstructured data. Cohesity gave us the ability to start leveraging our OneDrive, SharePoint, and Team sites more without worrying about excessive cost overruns.”

In addition to using Cohesity DataProtect delivered as a service to back up its M365 mailboxes, TSS would like to bring all of the value of the Cohesity to its on-prem environment as well. They are also now evaluating DataHawk, Cohesity's SaaS security solution to help battle ransomware and other threats. DataHawk provides cyber vaulting, threat protection, and ML-powered data classification to determine potential attack exposure of sensitive data. "We would like to include Cohesity DataHawk as part of our security stack," concluded Humphreys. "The ability to do data classification on our unstructured data that we want to move into M365 would be invaluable, further strengthening our data protection arsenal."

TSS realized many benefits by moving to Cohesity, including:

- Enhancing data security and improving ransomware protection
- Reducing reliance on costly, on-prem storage
- Cutting data recovery time from days to minutes
- Facilitating cybersecurity insurance renewals

About The Southport School

The Southport School (TSS) is an independent Anglican boys school located in Southport, a suburb on the Gold Coast of Queensland, Australia. Established in 1901, TSS currently educates over 1,680 students (including 300 boarders) from kindergarten to year 12, with more than 300 faculty and staff located across two campuses.