



Protecting information,
infrastructure & interactions TM

CASE STUDY **ASTER GROUP**



"Gradian has the personal touch. They're a small team; highly committed, resourceful and very easy to work with. We like to build our relationships with key suppliers as an extension of ourselves. We trust them implicitly."

Steve Maidment, IT Services Manager, Aster Group

COPYRIGHT

© 2017 Gradian Systems Ltd. All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without prior written permission of Gradian Systems Ltd.

ASTER GROUP BUILDS A SECURE WEB AND EMAIL INFRASTRUCTURE WITH EXPERT SUPPORT FROM GRADIAN

Aster Group is working towards its vision of ensuring everyone has a home. Its purpose is to be an ethical housing developer and landlord to benefit society. Established in 1990 and with more than £1 billion in assets, Aster will develop 9,500 homes over the next seven years for open market sale and shared ownership, reinvesting its profits to develop homes for rent. Altogether, the not-for-dividend Group owns and maintains more than 28,000 homes and provides services to 75,000 customers.

When it comes to web and email security, Aster doesn't take any risks. The company's proactive, vigilant security strategy is focused on safeguarding the 1,400 users from compromised websites and malicious downloads, while simultaneously protecting those same users from new and emerging email-borne threats. To make this happen, Aster relies on two leading-edge Symantec software-as-a-service (SaaS) solutions: Symantec Web Security.cloud and Symantec Email Security.cloud.

The challenge for Aster was not the features and capability of the Symantec technology, but instead the way the integrated solution had previously been implemented. Richard Strange, IT Operations Director for Aster Group, picks up the story.

"We purchased the Symantec services some years ago, but the technology had been largely neglected," he explains. "We used some of the web filtering features but knew the software was capable of so much more. We wanted to exploit that."

Action was needed. The Symantec technology was being ignored to the extent that users were sometimes bypassing the web filtering service, with consequences for web misuse and pressure on bandwidth. Strange had previous experience with Gradian and recommended Steve Maidment, IT Services Manager for Aster, take a look at their expertise and experience. "My previous knowledge of Gradian, coupled with the company being one of the top tier Symantec partners in the UK, convinced me that Gradian was the right partner to take our security forward," says Strange.

"We were looking for a data security partner; one that understands our business inside out, one we can trust to give us the best advice, and one that proactively pushes ideas our way," says Strange. "Shortly after we met the Gradian team, I knew our Web and Email security would be in safe hands."

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

- Neglected relationship with existing IT solution provider
- Maximise web and email security, whilst maintaining usability
- Enable staff to work securely anytime and anywhere

WHY GRADIAN?

- Breadth and depth of understanding of Symantec technology
- Agile and responsive business partner
- Widely acknowledged to be in the top tier of Symantec partners in the UK
- Personable and easy to work with

DRIVING MAXIMUM VALUE FROM THE EXISTING SYMANTEC INVESTMENT

Having discounted the option of deploying new software in place of Symantec, the brief given to Gradian was straightforward - drive maximum value from the existing Symantec investment. To do that the Gradian team first needed to understand the estate: Aster has 1,400 staff on Microsoft Windows 7, with approximately 1,200 using email, 900 using web filtering and 600 using smart connections for laptops and other devices.

"From day one, Gradian was extremely responsive," says Strange. "Their first step was to assess the state of our infrastructure following which the team immediately put in place new configurations, fine-tuning the email and Web environment. They were particularly careful to balance the need for maximum security against usability and convenience."

From a web filtering perspective, Gradian categorised individual sites to ensure content remains accessible while restricted content is controlled. In parallel, the team defined granular policies to control the data that could leave the network over the web. Gradian steadily increased the malware protection across the user community before eventually turning the filtering technology on.

In terms of email filtering, Gradian configured the environment to accurately block threats, prevent targeted threats and use Data Protection policies to prevent data leakage and meet privacy requirements. "Gradian performed a highly successful anti-phishing exercise using some vulnerable users; the rules they configured stopped the phishing attack in its tracks," says Maidment.

EXPERT ADVICE AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

All of this is backed by expert education. Strange again: "Our infrastructure team comprises just three people, so as you can imagine we are technology generalists. Gradian helps us quickly understand the features of the Symantec technology, how we can get the most out of the functionality and how we can proactively continue to ensure the security and availability of our web and email environments going forward."

Through its relationship with Gradian, Aster also has fast, direct access to Symantec when it is needed. "If we need to talk to the account team in Symantec or one of their architects—whether it's to discuss a feature or understand the future product roadmap—Gradian can organise it for the next day," says Maidment.

So what is the Gradian 'secret sauce' - the special ingredient that turns an IT services provider into a trusted partner? "There's no denying that large IT services providers are experts in their fields but they're often too big and cumbersome to work with. You sometimes can't get the answer you want straight away whereas Gradian has the personal touch. They're a small team; highly committed, resourceful and very easy to work with. We like to build our relationships with key suppliers as an extension of ourselves. We trust them implicitly."

BUSINESS BENEFITS

- Maximised the value derived from Symantec features and functionality
- Optimised web and email protection – quickly, easily and non-disruptively
- Enabled Aster Group to manage housing development business at lower risk
- Increased Web protection, improved control and streamlined management
- Delivered expert, responsive support, consulting and advice

CONFIDENTIALITY

This proposal contains confidential material that is proprietary to Gradian Systems Ltd. The material, ideas, and concepts contained herein are to be used exclusively to evaluate the capabilities of Gradian Systems Ltd. The information and ideas herein may not be disclosed to anyone outside the intended recipient without the express permission of Gradian Systems Ltd or be used for purposes other than the evaluation of Gradian Systems Ltd capabilities.