

Marshall Community School District Adds Critical Security Layer with Akamai Enterprise Threat Protector



“As a small IT team, we can’t be specialists in security – we need to wear many hats. Akamai Enterprise Threat Protector reduces the need for us to be security experts by delivering the protection we need to confidently ward off Internet threats.”
– Marshall Community School District Information Technology Director Darin Hostetter

Warding Off Malicious Threats

In keeping with their mission to prepare students to succeed in the modern world, today’s schools provide Internet access to students and staff. While Internet access opens a window onto the wider world, it also provides an open conduit for malicious threats. That was the situation facing Darin Hostetter, information technology director for the Marshall Community School District in Illinois, comprising four schools and a unit office.

For Marshall’s 1,300+ pre-K and K-12 students and 150 faculty and staff, the Internet enables a worldwide connection to email, discussion groups, databases, shareware software, and other informational sources, such as libraries and museums.

Marshall’s school population is savvy and has been educated to be suspicious of phishing attacks and other threats. Combined with firewall and antivirus protection, this kept the district largely safeguarded against malicious attacks and unwanted infiltrations. However, when the CryptoLocker ransomware hit, Darin and his single IT staff member found themselves scrambling.

Looking for a Steadier State

The virus spread rapidly, but was contained to a fairly small section of the network. Even then, Darin and his teammate had their work cut out for them. They needed to figure out which machines were infected, fix each one individually, and restore or delete files. “We didn’t lose many files, but it took a couple of weeks to identify the infected machines and clean everything up,” explains Darin.

With a small IT team sidelined by the ransomware, other IT projects were put aside. “We were in a bit of an unsteady state, with everything else put on hold.

Our staff and students rely on us to keep equipment and technology working as expected. When we’re not available to make that happen, they are at a disadvantage and need to find workarounds,” continues Darin.



COMPANY

Marshall Community Schools
Marshall, IL

INDUSTRY

Public Sector

SOLUTION

Akamai Enterprise Threat Protector

KEY IMPACTS

- Strengthened security posture
- Improved protection against phishing attacks
- Gained peace of mind about ability to mitigate threats
- Freed up IT resources to focus on core projects

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Bolstering Security with Enterprise Threat Protector

Coincidentally, Darin became aware of Akamai Enterprise Threat Protector around this time. After opting to run a free security checkup using the service, Darin realized how many threats were getting past the district's firewall. Moreover, his firewall outright failed during the test. That's when Darin realized he needed to add a security layer. "If you're not seeing the threats your firewall is missing, you can't possibly realize what's getting through. The security checkup was a wake-up call," he explains.

"We have upgraded our firewall a number of times since 2009, each one better than the last. But threats and technology are constantly evolving, so the cloud-based Enterprise Threat Protector was very appealing as we wouldn't need to continuously upgrade hardware or software. Plus, while a firewall is a single point of failure, the cloud-based Akamai solution is resilient to any outages," says Darin.

Enterprise Threat Protector adds a layer of security using DNS as a control point to block malicious domains and communications for all users and devices, whether they are on or off the network. According to Darin, he's never gone through a simpler implementation. "I changed two IP addresses on our DNS forwarder and we were up and running."

Saving Time and Gaining Peace of Mind

With Marshall Schools' external recursive DNS traffic redirected to Enterprise Threat Protector, Darin can be confident that all requested domains are checked against Akamai's real-time domain risk-scoring threat intelligence. "I've always worried about how to mitigate and defend against threats, but I've gained peace of mind with Enterprise Threat Protector as an added layer. It has caught and stopped many threats that would have been time-consuming to fix," he says.

Enterprise Threat Protector also helps Darin and his colleague stay up to speed on the latest threats. "With technology and attacks advancing so rapidly, we don't have time to keep up. Now we don't need to because the Akamai solution continually evolves along with threats," he continues.

In addition to being less worried about malicious attacks, Darin and his colleague are able to refocus on the IT-related projects needed to keep the district's schools running smoothly. "Time is money and Enterprise Threat Protector has given us back time that we can spend more productively," Darin concludes.



Enterprise Threat Protector allows Marshall Community Schools to spend their time more productively and have peace of mind regarding the threat of malicious attacks.

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The Marshall Community School district is located in Illinois in the United States. Its mission is to help students develop an appropriate plan for post-secondary success, provide students with essential curricular experiences that prepare them for college and/or the workforce, and help students develop 21st-century life skills, become lifelong learners, and understand the value of good character and service. <http://www.marshall.k12.il.us/>



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