



Case Study Curtins

Curtins are an award-winning consultancy, with over 60 years of experience in the built environment. David Price, Head of IT at Curtins, approached Xeretec to discuss some concerns he had over email security. Xeretec were well placed to advise having gained Platinum partner status with leading email security provider – Barracuda. Together Xeretec and Barracuda were able to offer Curtins innovative security products which have enabled them to minimise risk while maximising IT productivity.

Impact of COVID-19

“When the crisis hit, we quickly escalated from having to protect a 14-office business to a 440-office business overnight,” says David Price. His employer, building consultancy Curtins, was glad of his foresight in purchasing Barracuda Total Email Protection just a month earlier.

“Because it’s a cloud-based solution, there wasn’t anything we had to change,” he continues. “The protection was there whether users were in the business or outside. That meant one less headache to think about.”

Twenty-four hours later, it was business-as-usual for Curtin’s IT department.

Of course, the Total Email Security solution wasn’t initially brought on board to improve business continuity in the event of a viral pandemic. In reality, the decision was made after Price joined the company as Head of IT a few months previously.

Profile

- Curtins are an award-winning consultancy specialising in the built environment, well known for their work as civil and structural engineers
- 60-year heritage
- Fourteen offices and 400+ employees across the UK & Ireland

Challenges

- Native Office 365 security allowed too many malicious threats
- Low levels of staff security awareness
- Reactive IT stance meant too much fire-fighting

Solution

- Barracuda Total Email Protection





Email Problems

With a job function covering everything from budget, day-to-day IT and longer-term strategy, Price was given a mandate to help make Curtins IT, and the business in general, more proactive.

After looking at their current IT set-up, Price spotted several areas that needed attention, not least a propensity to “set-and-forget” solutions and policies, which can create gaps in protection over time.

“While we certainly weren’t doing anything wrong, security may not have been high enough up the agenda as it should have been,” says Price. “When we started to drill into certain areas like email, it became clear with a fresh set of eyes that we were being targeted quite a bit.”

In fact, the existing Office 365 native security being used by Curtins at the time was allowing a high volume of malicious emails through to staff inboxes. These ranged from generic Office 365 log-in phishing attacks to more sophisticated spear-phishing of senior executives. Hijacked accounts were used to launch CEO impersonation attacks on other members of staff.

Price also noted that staff security awareness needed to be addressed across the company. “You can have the best security in the world but if you have someone who is going to make a mistake you’re going to be caught out,” he argues.

Enter Xeretec and Barracuda

The first port of call for Price was to revisit the organisation’s existing Office 365 policies, but it soon became clear that third-party expertise would be needed. Xeretec and Barracuda were well known to Price, and although he was drawn initially by the AI-powered threat protection capabilities of Barracuda Sentinel, the conversation soon broadened to other areas of the IT environment.

“Barracuda solutions complemented other areas of the business.”

David Price, Head of IT, Curtins

“We were focused on the email piece initially, but when we started talking the conversation opened up to the wider security piece. Here it became clear that Barracuda solutions complemented other areas of the business that we thought were not quite operating as they should be,” says Price.

One of these was email archiving, which Curtins didn’t have a dedicated solution to manage — instead requiring individual users to manage and save any relevant emails to public folders.

However, Price judged that this approach was exposing the business to unnecessary financial and reputational risk as important emails to clients and partners could not be sourced.

Barracuda Total Email Protection was selected by Price for these reasons, offering comprehensive inbox defence and gateway protection, alongside PhishLine security awareness training, the Forensics and Incident Response (FIR) Outlook add-in, and archiving and back-up for improved resilience.

Deployment went without a hitch and Price describes the support he received from Xeretec and Barracuda as “second to none”.

“Using this process has reduced spam email based tickets into the helpdesk.”

David Price, Head of IT, Curtins

Confidence and Control

Several months into its use of Barracuda Total Email Protection, Price and his team have noticed improved threat protection, enhanced security awareness from staff and better risk mitigation via highly effective backup and archiving.

Sentinel’s AI capabilities are singled out for particular praise. “Our perspective was that Sentinel is a product that won’t take someone hours each day to manage, whereas for other vendors it would almost be a full-time job to trawl through the logs or keep an eye on the spam catcher,” explains Price. “That AI-based continual learning piece was very good for us.”





Xeretec

PhishLine, meanwhile, has elevated Curtin's awareness training from simple security comms to running real-world simulation exercises which help to challenge and test staff, allowing one-to-one training for those who need it.

"Another nice feature is the ability for users to flag suspicious emails direct from Outlook via the FIR add-in. Being able to see who clicked on links, opened or replied to emails with continuous remediation for belt and braces is invaluable," Price continues.

"Using this process has reduced spam email-based tickets into the helpdesk, users recognise we will review and action across all users who may be affected. Generally, we can clean up the email without users noticing, whereas before we may have received several emails into the helpdesk."

Other wins for Curtins have been the solution's backup capabilities, which have added an extra layer of risk mitigation in the event of ransomware, whilst both saving money on its existing SkyKick license and offering broader coverage.

Whereas before only email and SharePoint content was backed-up, now the entire Office 365 environment is covered, says Price. An added bonus on the archiving front has been the Barracuda solution's seamless indexing of millions of messages in user inboxes, to cover the period even before it was installed.

More Proactive, More Secure

Perhaps most importantly, the email platform does all the heavy lifting, which in turn allows Price and his team to focus on higher value tasks.

"When I joined a lot of the IT department were running around fighting mini fires all over the place," he explains. "We've put a lot more structure into what we do now and more focus on what individuals have responsibility for, which has given us the time to focus on what's further down the line instead of the day-to-day. It has made us more responsive in what we do."

This came in handy when all hands were required on deck to manage the rapid transition to remote working in March. Even more directly, the Barracuda solution has also enabled Curtins to attain Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation and, "will help us on the journey" to ISO 27001, says Price. The firm is already two-thirds of the way there, and with Xeretec and Barracuda support, there's no looking back.

To learn more about Barracuda & Xeretec

Contact us at info@xeretec.co.uk

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