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BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

Boise State's Cyberdome Program Leverages Open XDR to Deliver Managed Security Services to Idaho Cities and Schools

Providing Students with Combined Real-World Hands-On Training and Leading Curriculum

Established in 1932, Boise State University has grown into a major university with dozens of graduate and post-graduate programs in a variety of disciplines. To help train analysts for careers in the exploding field of cybersecurity, the University's Institute for Pervasive Cybersecurity grants certificates, bachelor's, and master's degrees. According to Cybersecurity Ventures, there are 3.5 million unfilled cybersecurity jobs in 2021, and the U.S. government's Occupational Outlook Handbook predicts that cybersecurity jobs are expected to grow 33% from 2020 to 2030.

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The Challenge: Real-World Education

Boise State administrators realize that classroom training is largely theoretical: there's a limited selection of cybersecurity tools with which students can learn their craft, and learning these tools doesn't give students experience in spotting and responding to cybersecurity threats in the real world. To address this challenge, Boise State University's Institute for Pervasive Cybersecurity director Edward Vasko initiated the Cyberdome, a real-world skills development program for students at the University.

Under the Cyberdome program, the university offers managed cybersecurity services to publicly funded schools, cities, and organizations throughout Idaho. By managing security for actual clients, Cyberdome students gain invaluable preparation for jobs in the industry. The program is expected to help increase the number of graduates while providing enterprise-level Security-as-a-Service to rural and remote communities across the state, improving the cybersecurity posture of these communities.

"The cybersecurity market has evolved rapidly since the beginning of the pandemic, especially when it comes to identifying and developing talented cybersecurity personnel, and we want to provide our students with an environment where they can make an impact, be challenged, and feel successful," said Edward Vasko.

Finding the Right Tool

To accelerate the Cyberdome program's rollout, Vasko and his team wanted to find a way to unify operation of their existing cybersecurity tools while adding new capabilities

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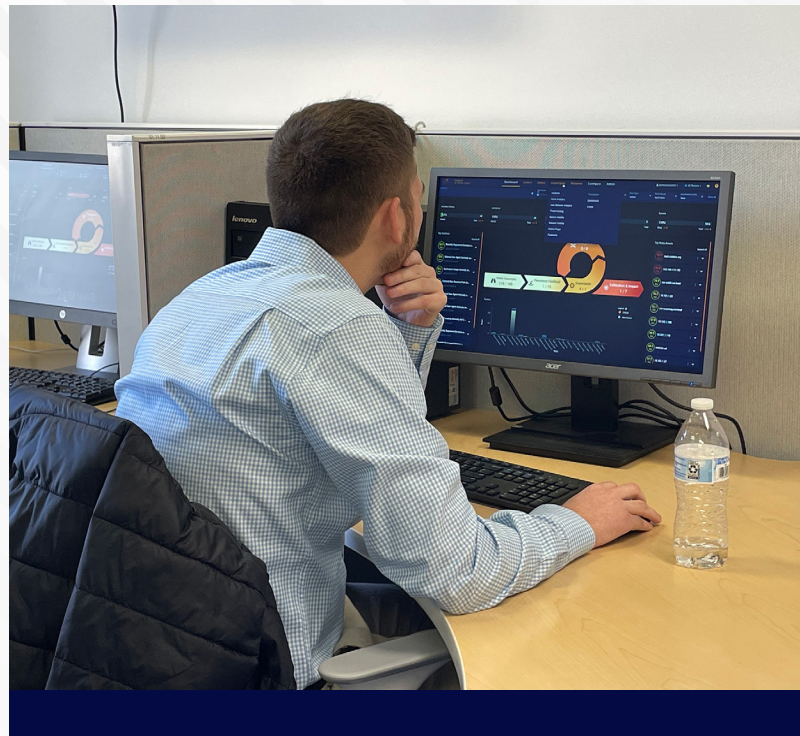
and making the entire system easier and more intuitive to use. Vasko had been attracted to XDR (Anything Detection and Response) platforms because they unify many different tools under a single interface. However, most of these platforms require users to abandon their investments in existing tools – a move that was a non-starter for Boise State University.

Vasko and his team then learned about Stellar Cyber's Open XDR platform – a solution that integrates telemetry from existing security tools under a single, intuitive interface and adds powerful new capabilities like NG-SIEM, NDR, UEBA and TIP. At Stellar Cyber, "XDR" means **Everything** Detection and Response.

"With the Stellar Cyber platform, we could plug in our existing tools while expanding our range of capabilities and giving students an easy-to-use dashboard for managing security," said Vasko. "It was a great solution for our needs."

Because the Stellar Cyber platform is powered by AI and machine learning, it automatically normalizes data from different tools into a single format in its data lake. It then correlates data among tools, groups related alerts into contextual incidents that users can immediately understand, and even corrects some issues automatically.

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All of this makes students more productive – instead of spending their time chasing often-meaningless alerts, they can focus on real issues and address them. Moreover, the Stellar Cyber platform includes multi-tenant management capabilities, so students can easily register new clients and onboard them quickly.

Results

Once word got out about the Cyberdome program in early 2022, cities and schools in Idaho took notice. First, the City of Sun Valley entered a Security-as-a-Service SecAAS relationship with Boise State. "Cities and public agencies across the country are increasingly falling victim to sophisticated ransomware attacks, and we want to be fully prepared to address them," said Walt Femling, City Administrator at the City of Sun Valley. "Boise State's new Cyberdome program enables us to outsource our cybersecurity preparedness and enhance our protection against such attacks."

More recently, several schools and other towns in Idaho have shown interest, and Vasko expects that his students will soon have several clients for which they will be managing security.

By leveraging the Stellar Cyber Open XDR platform, Boise State has created a winning scenario for its students, cities, schools, and public agencies across Idaho. Not only is it helping meet the security needs of rural and underserved communities, but it is also setting an example of what universities around the world can do to address the critical cybersecurity talent shortage.

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