Customer Details

Customer

Goodwill Industries of the Valleys

Products and Services

Azure

Microsoft 365

Microsoft 365 E5

Microsoft Defender for Cloud

Microsoft Sentinel

Microsoft Teams

SharePoint

Industry

Nonprofit

Organization Size

Medium (50 - 999 employees)

Country

United States

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Goodwill Industries of the Valleys Story Summary

March 6, 2024

Goodwill Industries of the Valleys expands opportunity for 30,000 people in Virginia each year. To accelerate its mission to eliminate poverty, the nonprofit shifted fully to the cloud. Transitioning its virtual machines to the cloud is allowing Goodwill Industries of the Valleys to transform its headquarters into a revolutionary new community center. Further, the nonprofit has stepped up its security stance to protect its vital work from bad actors.

The big blue letters of a Goodwill retail store are a familiar sight, welcoming shoppers to support the nonprofit's mission while buying secondhand clothes, home goods, and other items. Goodwill Industries of the Valleys runs these stores in Central, Southwest, and Southside Virginia—and does so much more. The nonprofit trains job seekers, provides opportunities for people with disabilities, and runs a community center and camps for youth. It is also spearheading the development of Melrose Plaza in Roanoke, which will house a grocery store, community health center, a bank with a financial coaching office, and The Excel Center—a school granting high school diplomas and job certifications.

A single vision underlies the nonprofit's many programs: to eliminate poverty. "That is a tall, tall task. We swing big because the ripple effects of our work happen for generations," says Hunter French, Vice President of IT for Goodwill Industries of the Valleys. "Technology helps us do the good work we're here to do. It is an instrumental part of providing opportunities for people to achieve their greatest potential."

In fact, Goodwill Industries of the Valleys' recent shift to the cloud enabled the nonprofit to move out of its central office, freeing up space for Melrose Plaza, set to open in late 2024. The nonprofit worked with Microsoft Tech for Social Impact for discounted services and grants for Azure usage, then completed the transformational projects in-house. By embracing the Microsoft cloud,

productivity suite, and security services, the nonprofit has also saved hundreds of thousands of dollars, empowered a remote workforce, and repelled cybersecurity attacks. Here's how.

Freeing up space to serve the community

Goodwill Industries of the Valleys had already started moving to the cloud when its CEO announced the plan to open Melrose Plaza in the organization's headquarters. The vision put the digital transformation on "superspeed," French remembers. "We couldn't go slow. The on-premise tech was holding us to that location. We decided to go all-cloud, all-in."

Instead of shifting all the nonprofit's virtual machines (VMs) to the cloud, the Goodwill IT team closely reviewed each one. They switched to a SaaS model, turning off servers as they went. For example, the nonprofit shut down their IP telephony system and adopted Teams Phone instead, saving "an outrageous amount of money" every month, French says. This process enabled the IT team to whittle down 112 on-premise servers to just three that they rebuilt in Azure.

The nonprofit moved out of its headquarters ahead of schedule, allowing construction teams to prepare the building for Melrose Plaza. French points out that by turning offices and server rooms into a grocery store and community center, Goodwill Industries of the Valleys has accelerated its ability to tackle poverty. "Simply put, technology transforms," he adds. "We left the legacy way of doing things behind. We're now using this building to empower individuals, strengthen families, and transform the community."

Advancing a work-anywhere culture

Goodwill Industries of the Valleys also rolled out the Microsoft 365 suite for its hundreds of employees. "The Microsoft 365 suite enables the work-from-anywhere model," French says. "Our workers are more productive, which matters because our work matters. Physically, we're not tied to a geographic location, but through our work we come together to serve our community."

The always-on nature of working in the cloud means employees never lose a document, collaborate on shared products in real time, and focus on their work in the field. For example, if an employee is helping clients prepare job applications, they can make notes in a Microsoft document that syncs to the cloud once they reconnect to the internet. "We're making people more efficient and making decisions based on the needs of our programs, not based on IT," French says.

Further, the nonprofit hasn't experienced a service outage since shifting to the cloud. The constant uptime enables staff to reliably and efficiently carry out Goodwill Industries of the Valleys programs, which serve roughly 30,000 people each year.

French is quick to point out that the nonprofit is doing this while saving money. They make the most of every aspect of the Microsoft 365 suite, from an intranet within SharePoint to virtual meetings in Teams. "Our effectiveness with our Microsoft IT stack is through the roof," French says. He estimates that shifting to the cloud saved the nonprofit hundreds of thousands of dollars in 2023. "That puts more money back in the mission of our organization. Microsoft puts it within nonprofits' financial reach to transform your organization, so you can accomplish everything you want to accomplish."

Becoming more secure than ever

A few years ago, a substantial security breach of a nearby nonprofit served as a wake-up call for Goodwill Industries of the Valleys. Since then, the organization has doubled down on security. "A cyber incident would grind what we do to a halt," French says. "But we're doing big things in our community. We don't have time to stop and deal with preventable security incidents. Microsoft helped us adopt a more significant security culture and come up with quick wins," he says.

One way the organization tracks its progress: checking and reporting on its security score on Microsoft Defender weekly, or even daily. "I love Microsoft security products because they filter out the noise and drive actionable security steps," French says. By following those recommendations, the IT team has increased its score by nearly 60 percentage points over the last two years—"with the additional financial spend of $0," since they used tools already included in their Microsoft 365 E5 license.

Microsoft Sentinel gives the IT team additional visibility into protecting the nonprofit. French can see it repel cyberattacks in real time. He wrote rules using built-in security tools with their Microsoft 365 E5 license and Entra ID to automate security responses, such as locking a user's account if a bad actor is attempting to log in with faulty passwords. French says, "In the nonprofit space, we're lean on staffing. That's why I automate security responses to the most common attacks. I leverage tens of thousands of hours of Microsoft's own knowledge and expertise."

That full-time protection keeps Goodwill Industries of the Valleys safe, even when French is off the clock. For example, he once got a notification of a foiled attack while he was on vacation. "Security automation stops attacks before they start," he says.

Now that most staff work from home or in the field where they support program participants, device security is more important than ever. Goodwill Industries of the Valleys uses Windows Autopilot to configure and update devices according to the nonprofit's specifications, all in mere minutes, with no hands-on time from IT staff. Microsoft Intune enables the team to manage all devices, deploy patches, and enforce conditional access. Multifactor authentication and access management with Entra ID "gives workers streamlined authentication with the most security and least hassle possible," French says. "I always know workers are playing by our security rules." Further, he periodically sends out phishing testing, a feature of E5 licensing. Users that fall for false phishing messages are automatically assigned training, so they know how to identify and respond to real cyber attempts.

For French, his goal for IT is simple: "We're enabling people to do great things through technology."