Case Study

University of the Pacific Cuts *Zero Trust* Timeline by 2 Years with Island

Island

Secure App Access

Protect sensitive data and secure access to critical applications

Compliance Assurance

Demonstrate compliance with regulatory frameworks

Educational Innovation

Further the educational mission with technology

Zero-Trust Deployment

Implement a zero-trust architecture

Founded
1851, California's first university

Organization size
9 schools and colleges
3 campuses
1,949 faculty and staff

Industry
Higher Education

Island product used
Zero Trust

Meet University of the Pacific

The University of the Pacific operates across three campuses in northern California. The private university hosts around 6,900 students in undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs and another 2,000 faculty and staff.

The university environment is dynamic, diverse, and distributed. This creates a challenge for Pacific Technology, the group tasked with delivering the technology services to support the university and its mission. In search of a solution that could fulfill their zero trust and data security goals, without adding friction for faculty and staff, The University of the Pacific chose Island, The Enterprise Browser

The Challenge

Protect Data and Meet Compliance Requirements

Within the university, nine Schools and Colleges bring diverse technology needs and operate with some degree of autonomy. These range from the Conservatory of Music to the School of Engineering and Computer Science to the School of Dentistry, among others. This environment requires a flexible and scalable technology strategy to meet a wide range of needs, while providing a common baseline of secure access.

Adding to this challenge are a number of data privacy requirements: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations covering student records, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) laws for medical records in dental and medical programs, Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) for financial transactions, and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), which defines data privacy standards for institutions in California. Compliance efforts must include both the security architecture and operations, along with systems to capture audit records that demonstrate compliance.

> “At the end of the day, what you can really do with this product is enable students to have the same experience as their faculty, or even folks who are medical professionals, but they're not seeing that sensitive information.”
>
> **Shawn Kerns, Information Security Analyst and Professor**

The solution

Flexible, Dynamic Access Policies

Island, the Enterprise Browser, gives the university the controls and data protections it requires, without disrupting its educational mission. Pacific Technology can set dynamic policies to protect sensitive applications and data, like patient records in the School of Dentistry. Students can access the EHR system through Island, but they can’t print, save, screenshot, or otherwise export patient data.

Island further protects patients’ privacy by masking personal data that isn’t required for dental visits. And every time a student accesses the EHR system, Island logs the activity to maintain an audit record.

Island’s portability and scalability, which is enabled by its unique architecture, sets it apart from other security approaches. Island focuses control and management on the “last mile,” the point of interaction between users, applications, and data. For most university users, that point is the browser.

For end-users to access university resources, all that’s required is to use Island as their web browser. They can install it on a university-managed laptop or a personal device and connect through any network. For private applications and systems hosted on premises, Island facilitates the secure network connection to their internal network, reducing the need for a separate VPN client.

> “Island has a clean and slick interface so we don't have to necessarily rely on users learning how to use it. Now it's seamless, meaning, once you're in, you get access to what you need. It's policy-driven. We have a few checkpoints for more sensitive applications, but again, I can roll that out at speed and with great efficiency to the end user, and also our IT teams. It really works for us.”
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> **Shawn Kerns, Information Security Analyst and Professor**

Delivering on the Mission of Educational Technology

Data security and compliance are necessary parts of the Pacific Technology strategy, but it doesn’t stop there. Equally important is the user experience for students, faculty, and staff.

By adopting Island, the university can deliver a workspace for the communities they serve that supports the educational mission. When users launch Island, they immediately see University of the Pacific branding, applications, and resources.

Everyday tasks are faster and more efficient. For example, Island reduces users’ manual logins by integrating with the university’s identity provider, easing access to web applications and remote systems over SSH or RDP. Pacific Technology can even modify or enhance web app functionality directly in the browser, optimizing the user experience without requiring costly development projects.

Prior to using Island, some students and faculty required virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) for certain workflows. Even in ideal circumstances, VDI can be cumbersome and require a learning curve. Now, Island delivers many of those workflows to dramatically improve the user experience.

> “Our mission at Pacific Technology is to deliver sustainable, secure, and innovative technology services that directly benefit the student and community-centered mission of the University.”
>
> **Pacific Technology Mission Statement**

“As quickly as this can be rolled out, I want to get even my students using Island, because a lot of them do coding, for example, in different tools. When I'm proctoring an exam, I want to be able to gray-out options or block options there. So I'm already thinking of the use case in the academic space. How can I provide the students with our one-stop shop? This is something that our president wants, our leadership wants, and, quite frankly, the students want.”

Shawn Kerns, Information Security Analyst and Professor

“Usually we use VDI to allow third parties to come in and use something on our network, in an ostensibly secure way. But this is a better solution for that. You can allow a third party to use Island with some policies around it and use some of your web applications — even on-premises applications using the Island connector.”

Mo Balakrishnan, Director of Information Security

“The pitfall of VDI is it's atrociously expensive, both from a hardware perspective and also the way that it's licensed. Because when you think about it, you're getting a triple hit on licensing costs. You're getting the VDI tax, you're getting the Windows tax, and then you're also getting your hardware tax. So the use case there, again, with a browser replacing that, it’s a big win.”

Shawn Kerns, Information Security Analyst and Professor

Implementing a Zero-Trust Architecture

The University of the Pacific is a distributed organization, with three campuses and a mix of on-campus and remote staff. One strategic initiative is to embrace the absence of a traditional network perimeter and implement a zero-trust architecture. Before choosing Island, the Pacific Technology team planned 2-3 years to update its infrastructure and systems to adopt zero trust. Island has already reduced that timeline by 1-2 years and substantially reduced the projected costs of implementation.

Island offers a zero-trust model that’s instantly familiar and fully portable across a wide range of device types. The Enterprise Browser supports the full range of user needs and easily onboards new users — even temporary third-party vendors who need occasional access. Island combines user authentication, device inspection, and network configurations all within the familiar browser experience. Meaning that onboarding is a simple process of installing and launching the Enterprise Browser, and then login.

Early in its Island implementation, Pacific Technology experienced an outage caused by another vendor that brought down a wide swath of internal systems. The team used Island to remotely connect to its internal network, remediate the issue, and get everyone back online quickly. This unexpected test of a worst-case scenario proved the utility of Island.

"Originally, we agreed on something like a two to three year plan. Now, we're getting that down to a one to two year plan. So that's half the time right there in terms of user adoption."

Shawn Kerns, Information Security Analyst and Professor

Conclusion

The Future

Within the first year of its Enterprise Browser journey, the University of the Pacific used Island to address several key challenges:

- Protect sensitive data and secure access to critical applications
- Demonstrate compliance with regulatory frameworks
- Further the educational mission with technology
- Implement a zero-trust architecture

And they're just getting started. Mo Balakrishnan, Director of Information Security, calls Island "the operating system of the future." Island's flexible and dynamic platform can address opportunities they encounter in the future, all delivered in a user experience optimized for end-user productivity.