WaterAid Streamlines Email Security to Protect Its Global Development Work

Human behaviour AI and automation stop flood of AI-based attacks so WaterAid can focus on clean water and sanitation projects.

WaterAid knows that health, education, and productivity start with reliable access to safe water. The global charity has helped more than 29 million people in 37 countries with sustainable, scalable solutions for water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) since 1981. "It's important that the communities we serve can trust us with their data and that our supporters can trust us with the money we're investing in WASH around the world," said Mark Sedman, Head of Global Cyber Security.

The WaterAid Email Security Challenge

WaterAid used a secure email gateway (SEG) and Microsoft 365's built-in security tools to protect its email, but advanced attacks were still reaching inboxes.

"We have a federated model with seven CEOs around the world, and attackers were using the CEOs' email addresses and LinkedIn data to send fake welcome emails to new employees, seeking their personal data," Sedman said. "That resulted in several fraud cases that eroded employee trust in emails from the CEOs." Vendor email compromise (VEC) attacks also caused monetary losses and created time-consuming remediation work for the security team. "This caused our IT team to seriously fall behind. We had to find a solution," he said.

WaterAid

Industry
Non-Profit Organisation

Headquarters
London, UK

Protected Mailboxes
3,000+

Customer Key Challenges

- Prevent advanced, targeted, AI-driven attacks from reaching inboxes.
- Avoid false positives due to staff travel in areas that may raise flags.
- Deploy automation to preserve security team resources for high-level work.

Abnormal Solution Impact

- Provides comprehensive AI-powered protection against sophisticated and highly-targeted email attacks and account takeovers.
- Avoids generating time-consuming, disruptive false positives thanks to its behavioural AI platform.
- Assesses user-reported emails, remediates threats from inboxes, and provides feedback to users to free up analysts' time.

"Our SEG was the same product in year three as year one. Abnormal is a different product because the company constantly adds new features, so the capabilities continuously adapt and evolve. We love working with Abnormal because the innovation does not stand still."

Mark Sedman
Head of Global Cyber Security

9%
of attacks stopped in 30 days were BEC, a high rate.

332
employee hours saved on graymail in 30 days.

27
countries where Abnormal protects mission data.

The Abnormal Security Solution

WaterAid needed a solution that could detect and stop advanced spear phishing and BEC attacks and reduce the security team's email investigation and remediation workload. Said Sedman, "We run lean teams. We wanted a provider that uses machine learning and AI to do the heavy lifting of triage, so we get fewer false positives and our teams can concentrate on the highest risks."

A trusted technology partner introduced WaterAid to Abnormal, and a POV followed. "During the POV, Abnormal highlighted several attack emails that had bypassed our SEG to land in inboxes. That was alarming because one of them was involved in a breach. From that point, we decided to move quickly to Abnormal," he added.

Why WaterAid Chose Abnormal

Abnormal's native AI and its API-based design help WaterAid work better. "We operate in countries that are often seen as attack sources, so Abnormal's human behaviour AI keeps us from being inundated with false positives," Sedman said. "We also operate in some low-bandwidth countries, and solutions that sit in front of Microsoft slow down our email, but Abnormal doesn't introduce delays."

Abnormal's AI Security Mailbox saves the security team time on email reports and remediation, and Abnormal's Email Productivity solution helps the entire organisation work more efficiently. "Email Productivity is my favourite. It manages the inbox so I can focus, our staffers can trust their emails, and our VIPs can concentrate on fulfilling our mission." Because of Abnormal's overall value and efficacy, WaterAid was able to remove its SEG.

A Security Partner to Support Safe Water Projects

Partnering with Abnormal allows WaterAid to focus on helping people access clean, reliable water and sanitation, resulting in healthier communities. Abnormal also makes WaterAid's partner ecosystem safer. "Abnormal has stopped several attacks from supposed vendors. One involved a trusted supplier whose email had been compromised. The personalised attack requested a deposit on an active project to a new account," Sedman said. "With Abnormal, we're not just protecting WaterAid, we're also protecting our suppliers, and that increases trust."

"Sophisticated attacks are using AI to mimic the language that we use at WaterAid, so it's becoming harder for a human or a SEG to tell what's good and what's malicious. Abnormal gives us the human behaviour AI we need to counteract these attacks without the cost of a SEG."

Mark Sedman
Head of Global Cyber Security

Abnormal Products in use:

- Inbound Email Security
- Account Takeover Protection
- AI Security Mailbox
- Email Productivity

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