

This Lawyer's Data Got Held Ransom for \$200,000. Then He Called Protected Harbor.

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ESBIN & FEINMESSER PLLC

INTRODUCTION

Esbin & Feinmesser, PLLC is a boutique law firm that prides itself on offering legal and advisory services that match those of large corporate firms while crafting a more personal experience for its clients.

Being in practice for over 20 years, they have a lot to protect. Partner Scott Esbin explains, "as a law firm, we're just inherently conservative about putting our data and files in somebody else's hands. There's a whole host of rules that we have to abide by in terms of client confidence and security.

Law firms can be brought down ultimately, and lawyers could theoretically be sanctioned if they're not careful about how they treat their data."

With all the news in 2019 of the cyber-attacks on corporate giants like Facebook and Citibank, his firm's security was heavily on his mind. Esbin knew that they would likely close the business when client confidence was lost. He would have to have many very tough conversations with clients and employees.

CHALLENGES

Despite the trend at the time toward cloud-based storage, Esbin wasn't convinced it was the proper course for his firm. He found an IT provider he thought could help.

The vendor seemed like a good fit for Esbin & Feinmesser initially, but things began to shift over time. There was no cohesive, intentionally-developed plan to achieve the organization's goals and satisfy its security needs. The proposed solutions were often a quick-fix of new software with more equipment.

Esbin & Feinmesser housed their data in the office to circumvent Esbin's fears about cloud technology. They had more machines in the office than employees. There was way too much volume with no design, so it was not enough to keep the business safe—and those choices cost Esbin dearly.

"We had to pay for our licenses. We had to pay for people to come in. We had to pay for hardware when a computer would bust. It was expensive. I would have spent \$50,000 - \$100,000 more on computers and, licensing, other costs." Esbin recalls.

Then in March of 2020, what Esbin had always feared, happened...

AT A GLANCE



Ransomware attack shut down this lawfirm and put them on the defensive.



Refused to pay \$200k ransom



4.8 terabytes of data recovered



Decreased I.T. costs by 50%



CHALLENGES (continued)

"We got hacked," Esbin shared. "We couldn't access email. We couldn't access our servers. It was like somebody came in and put a giant padlock on all of our stuff. We still, to this day, don't know exactly how it happened. We think it was a bad attachment somebody opened."

Rather than giving in to the ransom of \$200,000.00 USD, Esbin immediately knew he needed a new IT provider that could help him regain access to his business. Still, more than anything, he needed better protection so this could not happen again. Keeping the servers in his office did not prevent intruders, but he still had doubts about cloud-based storage.

Protected Harbor sat down with Esbin and listened to his concerns. He worried if his data was safer sitting next to him in the office or the cloud. How could the firm stay safe? How can he make sure this doesn't happen again? How could he keep an employee from making a mistake that may take down the company?

Solutions

Protected Harbor calmed these fears quickly by explaining how the process would work, why cloud-based storage was safer, and how they would protect him from future attacks with monitoring and redundancies. Then they worked as a team to put the pieces of Esbin & Feinmesser back together.

Nick Solimando, Director of Technology at Protected Harbor, said he believes "ransomware hit the servers in our client's office. It got down to cryptic system files to the point where servers wouldn't even function properly and wouldn't boot up properly. None of their file shares were functional."

Fortunately, none of their data was leaked and some of the data were not infected so severely that Protected Harbor could look at those files. The equipment, on the other hand now essentially scrapped metal.

Solimando illustrated Esbin & Feinmesser's new security measures saying, "Our goal is to put clients in a protective bubble. We don't want you to worry about the IT—so you can focus on your business."

Protected Harbor always starts with an audit of the client's current system and what their needs are. But this migration was unique because. Esbin came with only pieces of data, and the plans were down. So Protected Harbor analyzed the entire picture to see what was salvageable and asked Esbin what functions were most important for recovery.

"We have a lot of unique programs that we use that are proprietary," Esbin immediately answered. "They're unique to us; we own them. If I don't have them, I don't operate."

In the end, Protected Harbor worked with Esbin's programmers to reconnect and successfully integrate the custom application.

Protected Harbor was able to recover 4.8 terabytes of data and only 200 gigabytes were ultimately lost. They managed to retrieve a suitable backup file about two months old, but it was valid and able to be restored. Out of roughly ten years' worth of data, Esbin was only missing a fraction of data, but their system was restored, and they could continue operating.



"We've slashed our technology budget by half, sending it back to the employees. We've redeployed those funds to things like healthcare, salaries, and bonuses for the staff."

Scott Esbin, Partner
Esbin & Feinmesser, PLLC



Solutions (continued)

Protected Harbor even worked with end-users to recreate their environments so that their files and access were back to normal after less than a month.

As Esbin & Feinmesser's systems returned online, they needed to be fully protected. "We put them in a virtual environment in our data center and gave him his dedicated virtual network. So it's just him in there, nothing else. He's segregated and isolated." Solimando elaborated. Malware scanning and monitoring are a part of Protected Harbor's default environment.

The monitoring services are comprehensive and prevent threats instead of reacting to them. Esbin now benefits from constant monitoring for things like RAM, CPU, and disk space to ensure everything is performing as it should. If it's lagging, Protected Harbor is already looking into it and resolving the issue before the end-user is impacted.

Known malicious IP addresses, attack vectors, and even whole countries are blocked out, not allowing anything to penetrate the network. Redundant internet, firewalls, switches, virtualization nodes, backup architecture, and mechanisms help prevent errors and maximize uptime. If there is an issue, the backup files are completely inaccessible from where the admin users are.

"Most likely, the ransomware they got hit with before would never even reach the server today," Solimando assures. "It would get stopped by one of the protections upstream from them. If it got through all of that, we would be able to recover them inside of a day, probably less than 12 hours."

THE RESULT

Today Esbin is grateful that the hack happened when and how it did. He quotes, "'Fear is the mind-killer.' It's a line from a movie called Dune, but I think that's probably the biggest lesson I've learned from this.

I think that we were lucky that we got hacked. It's true because having what we have now works better than anything we've had in the past."

The lesson cost was high, but Esbin recognizes that the infiltration they experienced could have been much worse. Fortunately, none of his client data was taken or accessed. It was locked away, so they could not access it without Protected Harbor's services.

Esbin has a new confidence level as he knows his business is adequately protected. He has the support he needs, and when his company grows or changes, Protected Harbor will design a solution for him based on his individual needs.

There's always someone to answer Esbin's calls, even for help with the simple things that cause significant problems, like figuring out how to print on both sides of the page. He's received all the personal service and hands-on assistance he needs.

The cost savings with Protected Harbor is also significant. Esbin was pleased that while he's reduced his IT costs by roughly 50%, he has gained security, expert assistance when needed, and more peace of mind.