



# **Oxfordshire Innovation Engine 2023 Case Study - Sophos**

## **Sophos commits to Abingdon after PE sale**

Sophos is one of the best known cybersecurity companies in the world. International expansion had led to its opening offices throughout Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa as well as North and Latin America. Its HQ remains in Abingdon, reflecting both the company's roots and where it believes it is still best placed to tap into the brightest talent.

Its two founders, Jan Hruska and Peter Lammer, met while studying at the University of Oxford in the 1980s. The pair launched an anti-virus business in a semi-detached house in Kidlington before launching what is now its global headquarters in Abingdon. It houses SophosLabs, one of a network of threat analysis centres which monitors online activity to understand new and emerging cybersecurity threats.

Since the 2016 Innovation Engine report, the biggest news for Sophos is its 2020 purchase by private equity firm, Thoma Bravo for \$3.8bn. A year later, the business also opened an additional office, primarily for sales, in Manchester.

Abingdon was originally chosen at the company's headquarters not just because the founders met at nearby Oxford University. They felt the town's proximity to Oxford as well as London, Birmingham and Cambridge meant the business would be close to customers operating in some of England's biggest markets. Following the buyout, the company confirms it is still committed to the area as its natural home as it continues to offer access to those key markets. Most importantly, the company credits the universities of Oxford as providing a steady stream of top talent, whilst also hiring the best talent globally thanks to its hybrid and remote working models.

## Pioneering cybersecurity as a service

While the origins of the company lay in anti-virus, it is now fully-focussed on further developing advanced cybersecurity solutions which do not just detect existing forms of attack but can also respond to new threats. These include its Managed Detection and Response (MDR) and incident response services and a broad portfolio of endpoint, network, email, and cloud security technologies that help organisations defeat cyberattacks.

Last year Sophos launched upgrades to its Managed Detection and Response (MDR) service - a fully-managed, threat hunting, detection and response service that provides a dedicated 24/7 security team to rapidly identify and neutralise complex threats. It fuses machine learning and human analysis to spot threats and counteract them. The company claims that since August 2020, and the upgrades to MDR, the service has grown by 500% and is now used by 15,000 customers.

Since the 2016 report, the business has also launched an improved Sophos Firewall which it claims works far faster than previous releases, offering users great flexibility. The move has been designed, in particular, to support its channel partners as they help clients migrate their services to the cloud.

While firewalls monitor traffic entering networks, Sophos Intercept X uses AI to offer multiple layers of security at the 'end point', on the devices people use to access services. This is particularly aimed at adding an extra 'smart' layer of protection to spot and block the growing menace of ransomware demands. These typically occur when criminals trick an employee into clicking on a link or passing over their network credentials through a fake log-in page. When rogue actors have control of data or a corporate function, they then issue a ransom demand to return it.

The use of AI sums up how Sophos now seeks to actively protect computer systems, end point devices and their users from cyberattack. This work will lead to further updates to its detection and prevention services. The services it offers are bound to change in the coming years but the commitment to Abingdon appears to be constant, thanks to the history of the company, the town's proximity to major markets and the region's track record in supplying, or attracting, the necessary talent to grow the business.