Technology Helping Wildlife

TO PROTECT HABITAT, the Wildlife Heritage Foundation needs to keep its documents absolutely secure. That's what Quest Cloud Services are all about.

Kelly Velasco, associate director of the Lincoln, CA–based Wildlife Heritage Foundation (WHF), says she and her colleagues were prepared when Governor Gavin Newsom issued a stay-at-home order on March 19.

"We'd seen that the six Bay Area counties had already issued similar orders," Velasco recalls. "We basically knew this was coming down—so we had been ramping up."

Still, overhauling an entire office operation in less than two days presented a daunting challenge. Velasco says she's glad Quest was there to help.

On day one of the lockdown, a Quest technician came to her offices, where Velasco was working alone and caring for her two out-of-school children. On day two, she says, she was able to deploy 100-percent secure laptops to her now-remote workforce. "Security is extremely important to the WHF mission," she says. "So, this was a very big deal."

Velasco and Darla Guenzler, the foundation's executive director, also participated in a Business Continuity and Pandemic Planning webinar hosted by Shawn Davidson, Quest's VP of Enterprise Risk Management. The webinar, which was designed to help organizations position themselves to handle the suddenly transformed business landscape, included the development of secure work-from-home strategies and a playbook for performing central business processes under changed circumstances.

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Velasco points out that having worked with Quest for two years, she was familiar with many of the nuts-and-bolts business practices discussed in the webinar. "But it was nice to be able to go through the list with a trusted ally, and not just in my head," she says.

In some ways, the timing of this catastrophe could have been much more perilous for WHF. A land trust currently sworn to preserving more than 100,000 acres across California, WHF holds almost 200 conservation easements—legal documents that must be preserved in perpetuity.

WHF's stated mission is "toprotect, enhance, and restore wildlife habitat on lands conserved for the benefit of future generations." It does much of that work with what are essentially real-estate contracts that constrain whoever owns the properties under its protection from actions that might harm wildlife.

These documents, which are legally tied to a property's deed, contain copious amounts of sensitive information—from the specific, enforceable terms of the deals to various parties' financial data.

Two accrediting agencies—the Land Trust Alliance and the California Council of Land Trusts—have strict rules about protecting these documents in fireproof, flood-proof environments—something all land trusts take very seriously. Not long ago, WHF completed a process of transferring everything into the most secure environment possible—a cloud-based service run by Quest.

"We now depend on Quest to protect all of our information," Velasco says. "For anyone in this position, that is one of our chief concerns. And it's not something we have to worry about anymore."

In addition to providing Cloud Services, Quest helps WHF by essentially managing all of the foundation's technical infrastructure. Quest has been providing Managed Services to WHF since 2015, helping the organization migrate its email to a more flexible and secure platform and providing backup services, antivirus-protection, firewall monitoring, and helpdesk services.

"We call Quest out to our office all the time," Velasco reports, "and we always appreciate their attentiveness. We don't need to have an entire tech department because Quest is our tech department."

Quest's Emily Free, who has served as Account Manager for WHF for almost six years, says she has enjoyed helping the foundation evolve technologically. She recalls that when Quest helped WHF migrate to Microsoft Office 365 (now known as Microsoft 365) and move their email into the cloud several years ago, "they were early adopters."

"They were one of my first clients," Free says, "and it's been gratifying to see them grow and be able to assist with that growth."

In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, protecting the foundation and its information has become much more critical, Velasco says. And she predicts that the need for dramatically heightened security is here to stay.

"I'm afraid this is the new normal," she says. "I think this is going to change how we work forever."

Kelly Velasco, Associate Director of Wildlife Heritage Foundation (WHF) counted on Quest's help to deploy 100-percent of her newly remote workforce under California's COVID-19 stay-at-home order.

Compelled to Work Remotely?
How You Can Keep Your Organization Safe

TIM BURKE | President and CEO

IN OUR INDUSTRY, a key focus is helping people stay safe. Often, that means developing secure practices for remote work. Over the past few months, as so many organizations have been compelled to begin working remotely, we've had the opportunity to help countless make the transition with minimum disruption or risk.

Recently, a large healthcare organization, like so many others, got caught by surprise with an immediate need for remote work solutions for thousands of their employees. We were able to install software on everyone's computers and devices and quickly connect them to what I call "the mothership"—our servers in the cloud. That also meant launching help desk services so everyone working at home could continue to be productive.

None of this was much different from what we've been doing for years since remote work has been with us for a long time, but not anywhere near this scale. Last month, Twitter told its employees that they can choose to work from home "forever." That's been the case at Automatic, the company behind Tumblr and WordPress, since it was founded.

Unfortunately, as the number of remote workers rises, the bad actors recognize an opportunity to exploit the situation. That means that all of the personal equipment we use for work is suddenly more vulnerable to attack.

When people are isolated, they're a little more likely to be tricked into opening a bogus email—that's just human nature. Unless their personal workstation is secure, the malware winds up getting into the corporate environment, and as a result of this significant upswing in working from home, we are seeing ransomware skyrocket.

But if organizations take appropriate steps to secure their workforce, the remote-work scenario may actually be a blessing. Besides enabling staff to work wherever they need to, the ability to securely distribute your workforce has other benefits. For example, it vastly expands your talent pool. For instance, just because we are headquartered in Roseville doesn't mean we are limited to employing people within driving distance of our office. Now you can get accounting help in Dallas, and technical help in Des Moines, or Toronto. That's been the case for five to 10 years, of course, but it's likely that this present crisis will accelerate its acceptance.

In short, consider your remote workforce options now, be prepared to assess and remediate, and above all, keep your environment secure and your people safe.

Thank you for trusting us to help with your IT needs. Contact us anytime, we're always happy to help!

Risk Management Workshop

Quest's complimentary Risk Management Workshop will help you identify business risk factors and points of exposure in your organization. Get tailored recommendations for resiliency you can implement immediately. **Contact Quest to sign up for a Risk Management Workshop today.**