



CASE STUDY

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Other companies turn to Avanade when they need help with business transformations enhanced with Microsoft solutions. In keeping with the multinational consultancy's #humanimpact tagline, Avanade invests in the 39,000 professionals who carry its focus on digital innovation forward. That's why Avanade implemented Insider Risk Management – the compliance solution in Microsoft 365 that helps it balance its respect for employee privacy with its dedication to security for both internal Avanade assets and client data.

Business situation: A quest to streamline insider risk processes

In a space where players innovate lightning-fast and data security is non-negotiable, Avanade is a key competitor. Headquartered in Seattle, Washington, the professional services company stays true to its vision of leading in digital innovation by focusing on people (#humanimpact) and Microsoft technologies. With competencies in a broad cross-section of verticals, from manufacturing to nonprofits, the company has a proven track record in delivering high-quality solutions.

Avanade stakes a multi-billion dollar, worldwide company on trust – between its clients, its employees and the company itself. To that end, Avanade wanted to strengthen and streamline insider risk processes by supporting collaboration between HR, legal and IT security teams. It needed a technology it could roll out easily to respond to insider risks as fast as possible. The company zealously protects not only data, but its compliance with the plethora of data regulations that govern business activity around the globe. When Avanade implemented Insider Risk Management, a solution in Microsoft 365, it covered all those bases, with greater ease and effectiveness.

Building success with the right mix of people and solutions

Avanade delivers business solutions that emphasize Microsoft solutions, but that aim isn't just policy. It's key to driving the innovation that characterizes the company. That's what makes Insider Risk Management a natural choice to simplify and elevate Avanade's risk management strategy.

People are Avanade's most important asset. The company relies on the integrity and security/compliance awareness of thousands of knowledge workers deployed at client sites around the globe. At any given time, about 92 percent of Avanade employees are working far from the office perimeter. For Bob Bruns, Chief Information Officer and Security Officer at Avanade, trust is both foundational and multifaceted. "Our employees trust us to create the solutions that help them to be effective in the market, and we further build trust by educating them about our insider risk policies and solutions," he says.

Avanade's size complicates nurturing that trust. "We put a great deal of trust in our people," says Greg Petersen, Senior Director of Security Technology and Operations at Avanade. "But as an organization scales, the amount of risk carried by any individual increases."

"Client trust builds from that; only companies that trust us will do business with us. And mitigating insider risk is key to their faith in us, because when they know that we're protecting our employees, and by extension the assets they are partnering with us to develop, deploy or execute, our relationship grows from a solid foundation."
– Bob Bruns, Chief Information Officer and Security Officer, Avanade

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Solution: Deploying Insider Risk Management with ease

Avanade is addressing the complex issue of insider risk management by creating a change enablement team. “We’ve pulled people from various areas of our business to take on insider risk management, just as we do when we want to solve any other type of problem,” says Bruns. He believes that educating employees is critical. “Our change enablement team helps our people learn about data security so they can understand and change behaviors,” he adds. “And our security risk management group focuses on insider risk, working with legal and HR teams to address the challenge of balancing employee privacy with company safety.” Petersen concurs. “With a tool that addresses insider risk, it can be easy to bump up against employee privacy,” he says. “That’s why the pseudonymization feature in Microsoft Insider Risk Management is so important – it helps us to protect employee privacy while we protect the company.”

The deployment was a non-event technically. “With Microsoft Insider Risk Management, we’ve minimized moving parts,” says Petersen. “It’s a strong, reliable platform because it’s built into the Windows operating system on the endpoint. We don’t have another agent to deploy. The Microsoft 365 workloads, such as SharePoint, Exchange, Teams and OneDrive, are already integrated. So there are no scripts to configure. All we have to do is choose and set up an appropriate policy template and manage it.” It also means an end to manually collecting, consolidating, ingesting and correlating activity data. Adds Petersen: “Insider Risk Management surveys Microsoft 365 audit logs associated with our tenant to determine risk. It makes a huge difference.”

Bruns agrees. “We refer to what we call ‘the power of the ecosystem’ over best-in-breed third-party technologies in our space,” he says.

He also values the interoperability between Microsoft Insider Risk Management and data loss prevention (DLP) policies to classify and restrict use of sensitive information across many applications and storage locations. For Petersen as the security team manager, that translates into greater effectiveness – critical to small security teams like his that depend on efficiency to focus precious resources on the most value-added activities. They need to separate higher-risk

“Microsoft Insider Risk Management is a part of a powerful ecosystem of solutions that we use for everything – communications, content creation and management – so we can easily apply it and many other Microsoft security features to achieve a connected safety net.” – Bob Bruns, Chief Information Officer and Security Officer, Avanade

events from the sea of alerts that can swamp a security squad. “The industry is paved with other DLP and insider risk tools that just produce a lot of chaff that teams can’t get through,” he says. “We use Microsoft Insider Risk Management to focus our precious resources on the incidents and threats that matter most.”

“Keeping honest people honest” with a light touch and the right technology

Prior to its Microsoft Insider Risk Management deployment, Avanade didn’t use a specific insider risk technology. “Microsoft based its Insider Risk Management solution on its own experiences with insider risk,” says Petersen. “While a lot of other security tools come into play to manage it, insider risk differs from other types of risk. How you analyze and correlate the data and react to it is all the more important.”

Because people are so important at Avanade, Bruns and Petersen focus on strategies and applications that preserve that sense of camaraderie and teamwork. That’s why they looked for a proactive solution that would focus on education. “Our mantra is to keep honest people honest,” says Petersen. He points out that often, data exposure is inadvertent. Whether intentional or not, his team uses insider risk capabilities to stop larger incidents, informing workers about threats in the moment and blocking risky activity. “We use Microsoft DLP policies in conjunction with Microsoft Insider Risk Management to inform people,” he adds. “We assume positive intent, knowing that mistakes happen. When they do, our people nudge them to use better methods. If intent isn’t innocent, the person learns that we have visibility into a negative behavior and hopefully this bump against the guardrails helps them to make better decisions going forward.”

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Threading effective risk management through the ecosystem

Compliance is a vital aspect of securing data, especially for a company that serves so many Fortune 500 companies. “I appreciate the way Microsoft weaves third-party certifications and attestations into all its technologies,” says Bruns. “Whether its Sarbanes-Oxley or a health industry security standard, I can assure our clients that our Microsoft solutions meet those requirements.”

“We’re a people-based company, and trust is king,” says Petersen. “Every company risks fines for compliance breaches, but for us the reputational risk is much more serious. Our clients do business with us because they trust us.” That places compliance near the top of Petersen’s list. “The platforms and services that Microsoft provides are built with critical regulations around the world in mind,” he adds. “We use Azure, Microsoft 365 and other Microsoft technologies. If they weren’t built on a strong foundation that includes the controls necessary for us to meet these requirements, we simply couldn’t stay on top of compliance.”

As CIO/CISO, Bruns needs an insider risk management solution that achieves those compliance and client data security demands with the urgency needed for an effective response. “We rely on Microsoft Insider Risk Management to accelerate time to action on insider threats by reducing detection time and aggregating the related information more effectively and efficiently,” he says. “That ultimately helps to mitigate risk to the company by improving our response.”

About Avanade

Avanade is the leading provider of innovative digital and cloud services, business solutions and design-led experiences on the Microsoft ecosystem. With 39,000 professionals in 25 countries, we are the power behind the Accenture Microsoft Business Group, helping companies to engage customers, empower employees, optimize operations and transform products, leveraging the Microsoft platform. Majority owned by Accenture, Avanade was founded in 2000 by Accenture LLP and Microsoft Corporation. Learn more at: www.avanade.com

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Results: Creating collaborative security

Avanade is completing its Insider Risk Management rollout, but already it benefits from easier, more effective management. Petersen notes that the transparency afforded by the solution helps unify teams from Legal, HR and other areas with employees who know that pseudonymization protects individual identities while providing crucial guidance on practices and policies. “It’s been a catalyst for internal collaboration,” he says. “Working across teams helps us to do things we couldn’t have done before.” His team continues to work closely with the Avanade data privacy and data protection officers to “right-size” insider risk on a global scale. “By taking data privacy so seriously, we protect both our clients and our employees,” he adds.

Shifting employee mindsets while preserving security, culture and productivity may seem like a tall order, but Bruns is pleased with early results.

“We use Insider Risk Management to introduce just enough friction to safeguard data, but not enough to impact productivity,” he says. “And employees appreciate interventions that stop mistakes.”
– Bob Bruns, Chief Information Officer and Security Officer, Avanade

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