



How the City of Guelph Boosted Remediation Efficiency by Over 250% With Varonis



“If you’re looking to increase your operational efficiency, deliver value for money to your business, or purchase a security solution that will pay for itself, Varonis is the way to go.”

DAVID BOYLE,
IT MANAGER, CITY OF GUELPH



HIGHLIGHTS

CHALLENGES

- No data inheritance standards resulted in a complex file structure
- No clear data owners, therefore no accountability.
- Figuring out who owned data and authorizing access could take days for the small IT team
- Over 20 TBs of unstructured data—it would take years to clean up

SOLUTION

The most robust data security platform:

- **DatAdvantage** to gain more visibility and control over data access
- **Data Classification Engine** to scan for sensitive data
- **Data Transport Engine** to automatically transport data from multiple servers to one virtual cluster
- **DataPrivilege** to streamline file access governance

RESULTS

- 250% increase in operational efficiency
- Permissions for 5 individual service areas fixed in under one year
- Data owners granted more clarity and control over access, and fewer support tickets for IT

Challenges

GROWING ATTACK SURFACE ON CRITICAL BUSINESS DATA

Between 2018–2019, the city of Guelph in Ontario, Canada began rolling out Varonis products. Before this, they had a lot of data but no rules governing who could access it.

As a result, they had roughly 20 terabytes of data spread across different on-premises servers—a massive attack surface. Guelph was vulnerable to accidental data leaks from within as well as ransomware attacks from bad actors.

Worse, if something ever did happen, Guelph lacked a clear way to identify data owners and trace issues to their source. Rampant privilege creep, coupled with the seemingly random migration of some (but not all) information to a new data store, had resulted in an increasingly complex file structure.

They needed time to fix permissions and lock down data. But all that work fell on the shoulders of a very small IT team.

As IT Manager, David Boyle explains:

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“We were trying to do it manually. A project manager and an IT specialist would visit each service area and reel down into the folders and files. But we couldn’t figure out what we were allowed to change.”

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Even for a huge team, fixing 20 terabytes of broken inheritance, outdated file structures, and nested groups would be a massive undertaking. For a small team, it was nearly impossible.

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“We spent eight months remediating permissions, but we didn’t even finish one service area. Trying to fix things manually was taking too much time and wasting too many resources,” explains IT Manager, Manjusha Pradhan.

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Without a way to identify who needed access and who was actually accessing data on a regular basis, David and the rest of the IT team had reached an impasse.

Varonis helped them gain the visibility they needed.

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“The number one thing we wanted to do was improve our operational efficiencies. We needed to cut down on file access requests and improve our folder structure. We knew Varonis, and especially DataPrivilege, could help us accomplish those goals,” David says.

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—Manjusha Pradhan, IT Manager

Solutions

VARONIS HAD A CLEAR VISION AND METHODOLOGY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM

The IT team knew that to solve Guelph's underlying issues, they first needed to address the technical issues and business processes that were causing those problems.

That's where Varonis came in. Varonis' team helped IT Managers roll out solutions on select servers. They also helped David come up with a systematic plan of action that would enable Guelph to overcome its key challenges.

They started with DatAdvantage for Windows and Directory Services, integrated into their Active Directory. By allowing them to quickly and accurately pinpoint and revoke unnecessary access to sensitive data, DatAdvantage enabled the IT team to perform remediation with speed and certainty.

According to David:

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“In many cases, people either had access to folders they didn't need, or needed access to folders that they didn't have. Varonis helped us resolve that by automating how we assign and control data access.”

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Data Classification Engine helped David and his team pay special attention to folders that contained personal data. This made locking down permissions on overexposed PII and other sensitive info almost effortless.

Next, Guelph used **Data Transport Engine** to take data from multiple file servers and migrate it to a new virtual cluster. Varonis automatically validates all data moved this way to ensure that permissions and file structures remain intact.

Finally, David implemented **DataPrivilege**. This allows users to request access directly from data owners without burdening IT with support tickets.

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“Varonis enables me to take more control over the data my team creates and assign permissions based on who needs access,” says Stephen O’Brien, City Clerk.

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With DataPrivilege, individual data owners can easily perform entitlement reviews and manage permissions on the data they’re responsible for—approving, denying, modifying, or limiting privileges with a few simple clicks.

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“Varonis enables me to take more control over the data my team creates and assign permissions based on who needs access.”

—Stephen O’Brien, City Clerk

Results

HUGE IMPROVEMENTS TO OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

While remediation is still ongoing, Varonis has played a large role in helping Guelph clean up its complex file structures. Remediation efforts are now over 250% more efficient—and they’ve managed to fix more access issues in a single month than they’d previously solved in a full year.

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“We’ve already migrated five individual service areas in under a year. We’re planning to roll out Varonis to the entire organization soon, and we’d like to have that completed within the next year,” David says.

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For the IT team, having Varonis has meant a substantial downtick in support tickets. Spending less time putting out fires means that they can spend more time improving the city’s data infrastructure.

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“There’s less stress on the service desk, less stress on my team, and less stress on data owners who can now grant access to folders in under five minutes. Everyone’s happier—they’re getting results within minutes, not days,” says IT Manager Adam Fischer.

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From an overall business perspective, having a cleaner data infrastructure and a deeper understanding of where data lives has enabled them to be more dynamic and reduce their attack surface.

For David, Manjusha, Adam, and the rest of the IT team, that means more peace of mind. For the business as a whole, it means operational efficiency is at an all-time high.

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—Adam Fischer, IT Manager



Gain visibility and control over your environments.

Good data governance starts with understanding who has access to sensitive folders and implementing least privilege.

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