

Blackbaud response

Posted on 21 July 2020

For the attention of University alumni

The information below relates to a data security incident with a third-party service provider of the University of Northampton. This company provides services to the University to allow or the management of alumni contacts and provision of services. We believe the incident has involved a number of UK and US healthcare, educational and not-for-profit organisations, as well as University of Northampton alumni data.

We take our data protection responsibilities very seriously. We immediately launched our own investigation and further details are below, including the steps we have taken in response.

What happened

This week we were contacted by one of our third-party service providers called Blackbaud. They provide customer relationship management (CRM) systems for not-for-profit organisations and the Higher Education sector. They informed us that they had been the victim of a ransomware attack between February and May 2020. As part of the attack the cybercriminal was able to remove a copy of a subset of backup data from a number of their clients. This included a subset of University of Northampton data.

We use this system to record engagement with alumni, donors and supporters. Having undertaken a review of the information shared by Blackbaud mapped against our data, we are sharing details of this breach of Blackbaud's systems with those potentially affected.

What information was involved?

We would like to reassure our community that:

- a detailed forensic investigation was undertaken, on behalf of Blackbaud, by law enforcement and third-party cyber security experts;
- Blackbaud have confirmed that the investigation found that no encrypted information, such as bank account details or passwords, was accessible;

- Blackbaud also confirmed that no credit card information formed part of the data theft.

The data accessed by the cybercriminal may have contained some of the following information:

- Basic details e.g. name, title, gender, date of birth and student number (if applicable);

Addresses and telephone contact details and email details

Course and educational attainment details, e.g. Date Entered University; Date Left; Date Graduated; Class of Degree and what subject(s) you studied.

What are we doing about the situation

The supplier, Blackbaud, have attempted to protect customers' data (and your personal data) and mitigate potential identity theft, by meeting the cybercriminal's ransomware demand. Blackbaud has advised us that it paid the ransom and received assurances from the cybercriminal that the data had been destroyed.

The University of Northampton takes the view that the assurance of criminals is less than likely to set minds at rest and as such we have immediately launched our own investigation and have taken the following steps:

- We are notifying you so that you are aware of this breach of Blackbaud's systems and can remain vigilant. There are no fundraising campaigns in the pipeline for the University until at least December 2020 so please be very wary of any such approaches before such a date;
- We have informed the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) of the breach and are awaiting further guidance;
- We are taking steps to understand how many other parties in the higher education and the wider not-for-profit sector have been affected and are looking at sector wide responses to mitigate the worst effects;
- We are working with Blackbaud to understand why there was a delay between them finding the breach and notifying us, as well as what actions they have taken to increase their security.
- We will not be uploading any new data into the system until we are happy with the assurances provided.

There is no need for our alumni to take any action at this time. As a best practice, we recommend people remain vigilant and promptly report any suspicious activity or suspected identity theft to the proper law enforcement authorities. If your data have been involved we will be contacting you within the next week to supply you with further information.

If anyone would like to contact a member of the University of Northampton team, please contact: blackbaud-response@northampton.ac.uk.

Steps we have taken in response

We will continue to work with Blackbaud to investigate this matter, and we continue to take advice from our Data Protection Officer and IT security team. We very much regret the inconvenience that this data breach by Blackbaud may have caused. We have reported the matter to the ICO and will assist them in investigating the data loss caused by the security issues at Blackbaud. Please be assured that we take data protection very seriously and we are sorry for the inconvenience and worry that this will no doubt cause. We are as always grateful for our alumni's continued support and engagement.

[For further information about Blackbaud](#)