

Transforming Vulnerability Management From One Size-Fits-All to Truly Risk-Based

Security Camp 7 Aug 2025





Agenda



Welcome and Introductions





Solution Design and Implementation



Demonstration



Lessons Learned







Introductions



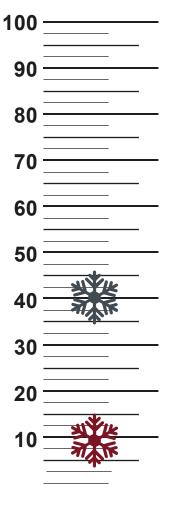
John Sorel, Sr. Security Engineer, Harvard University



Todd Conetta, Project Manager, Harvard University; SEI, Inc.



Journey of the Mind to Beat the Heat (New England Style)



Which month sees the most Snow?

February

What's the average annual snowfall in Boston?

~40 inches

Average biggest snowfall of the year?

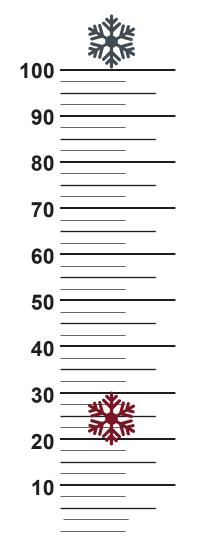
~9.5 inches

https://www.extremeweatherwatch.com/cities/boston/most-yearly-snow, https://www.currentresults.com/Yearly-Weather/USA/MA/Boston/extreme-annual-boston-snowfall.php





Journey of the Mind to Beat the Heat (New England Style)



What was the largest snowfall total for one winter?

108 inches

Okay but that was a long time ago, right?

2014 - 2015

So 2015 probably had the worst storm in recent years, too?

No - 23.5 inches 2022

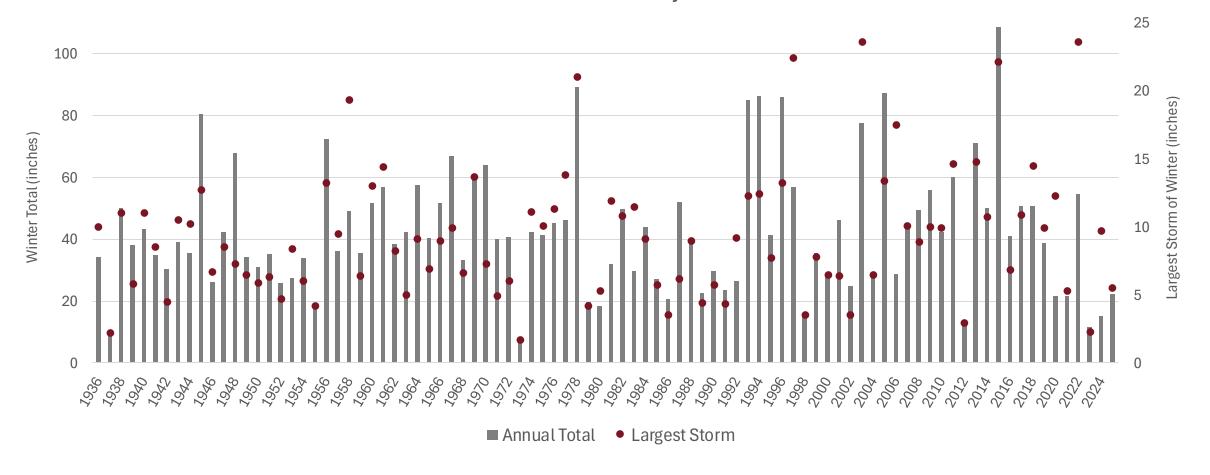
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A Historical View of the Data Set

Snowfall in Boston by Winter



https://www.extremeweatherwatch.com/cities/boston/most-yearly-snow, https://www.currentresults.com/Yearly-Weather/USA/MA/Boston/extreme-annual-boston-snowfall.php





The Problem we Faced: A Vulnerability Whiteout

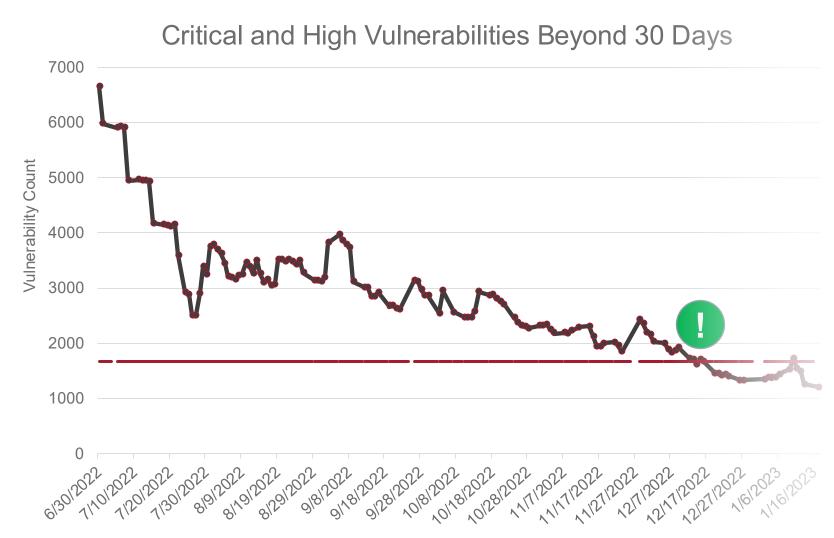


A Moment of Clarity in the Storm

- 2022 Call-to-Action, named as a top information security risk
- Addressed with an all hands on-deck goal:
 Reduce all critical and high severity
 vulnerabilities by 75% in Fiscal Year 2023
- Real improvements and impactful change:
 - Established a Community of Practice
 - Pilot processes for exception handling
 - Addressed bottlenecks in patching process
 - Increased use of automation



The Problem we Faced: Initial Success



FY23 Success

- Each school significantly reduced their vulnerabilities
- The University reduced by ~78%
- Information sharing, process improvement, better understanding of data

New Challenges Emerge

- Sustaining is actually hard!
- VM fatigue sets in
- Moving up the stack requires new stakeholders and often longer timelines

Chart does not represent the entire University, this is one school's counts in FY23





The Problem we Faced: Tackling What was Next



Evolving Threat Landscape

- Increasing volume and sophistication of threats
- High volume of vulnerabilities
- Limited resources and growing compliance pressures

Challenges with Traditional Approaches

- High-volume, low-priority workload
- Inefficient resource allocation
- Difficulty communicating risk to leadership





Building a Solution: Establishing a Framework for Execution

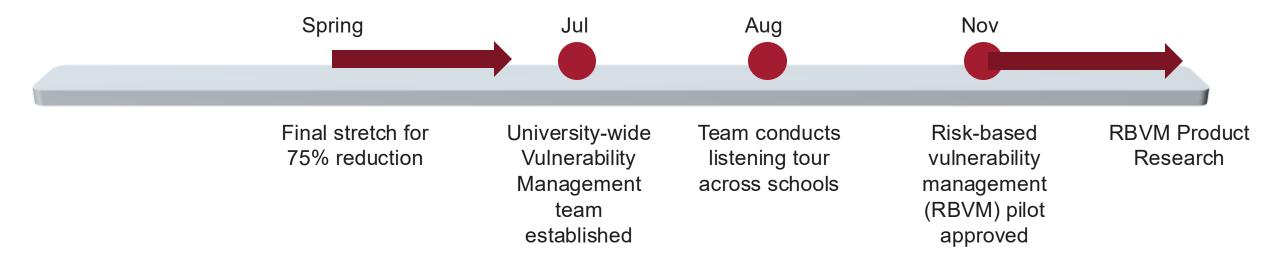
Launching a Risk-Based Approach

- Starting FY24: 3-Year Initiative
- Prioritize remediation based on true risk to the University
- Centralize standards to drive consistency across decentralized action
- Engage with partners to lay the foundation for strong stakeholder alignment
- Equip partners with the right toolset

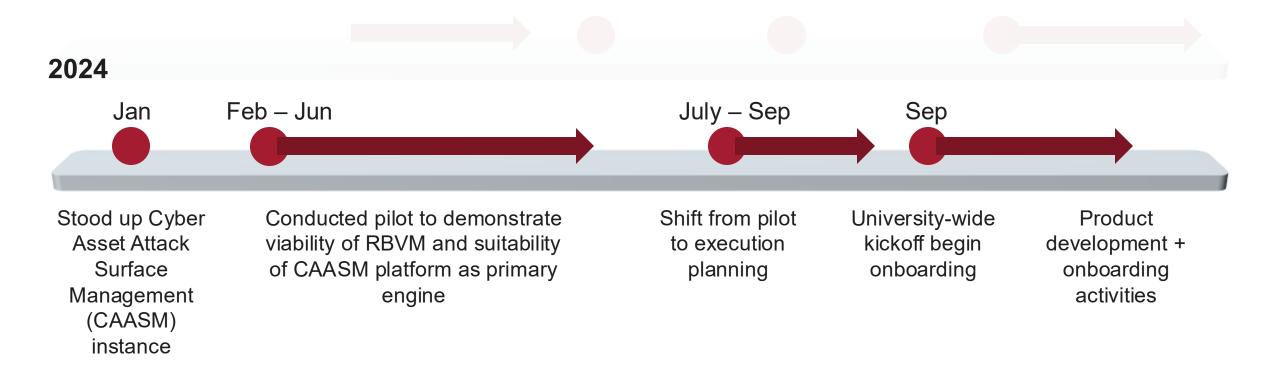




2023











2025 Mar May Aug Oct Begin new Complete First school Six schools ticketing Exposure onboarding ticketing Categories launched in launched in production production











Building a Solution: Calculating HVERS

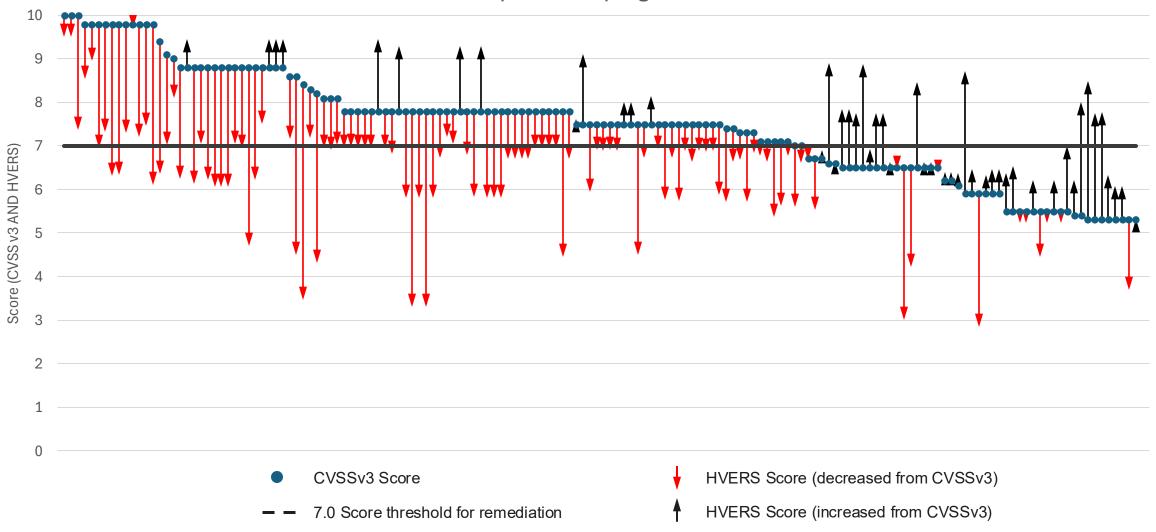
HVERS – Harvard Vulnerability and Exposure Risk Score **Vulnerabilities** Known **EPSS** CVSSv3 Severity **Exploited** Score **Devices** 50% Severity Exploit 50% Internet Not Internet Data Score per Unknown Criticality **Exposed** Sensitivity Exposed Score CVE Score 20% 20% Internet Risk Score Score per 60% Risk Score Pluginld or Exposure per per Device Score vulnerability QID 50% 50% Harvard Vulnerability and Exposure Risk Score (HVERS)





Building a Solution: HVERS v. CVSS (version 3)

CVSS v3 and HVERS for most prevalent plugins with CVSS v3 score 5.0+







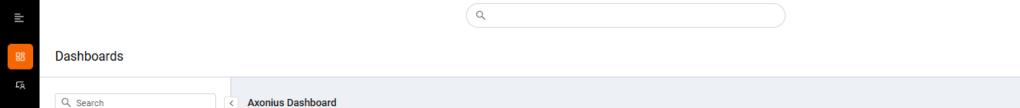
How the Solution Works: Demo

We'll cover the following solution components as part of our demo today:

- 1. Data flow from adapters: Tenable, AWS, Azure, 7. Vulnerabilities Instance Table **VMWare**
- 2. Dashboard for SMVP Compliance (Security Minimal Viable Product)
- 3. Dissecting device data, tag values and tag compliance
- 4. Enforcement Center Action Device Score
- Vulnerabilities Table
- Enforcement Center Action Vulnerabilities Score

- 8. Enforcement Center Action HVERS score
- 9. Enforcement Center Action for SNOW/Jira ticket generation
- 10. Enforcement Center Action for ticket update / Query for autoremediation
- 11. Exceptions, false positives
- 12. HVERS Dashboard







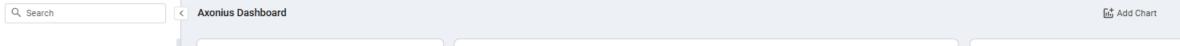












☐ Axonius Dashboard ★

System Lifecycle

Cycle

Duration

Next Cycle

☐ My Dashboard

∨ 🖀 Public

∨ ☆ Favorites

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∨ □ UWVM

□ On-Boarded Schools Status

Risk Based Vulnerability ...

⊞ School Status Dashboard

₩ UVWM HVERS

₽ Vulnerability Tickets

∨ □ HUIT

III HUIT Security Requiremen...

R Tagging Status for HUIT

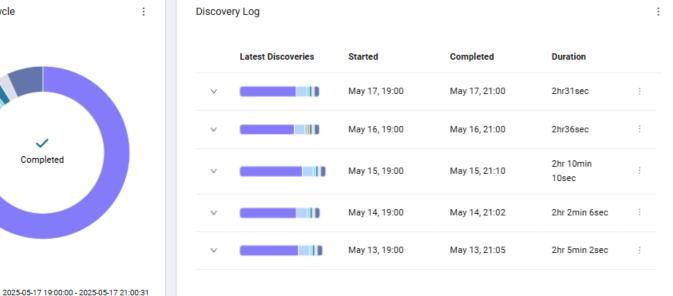
Demo

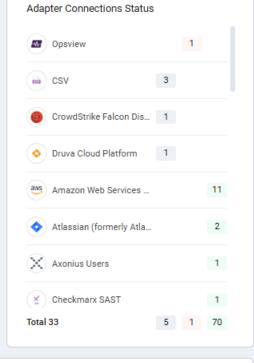
R Axonius Dashboard

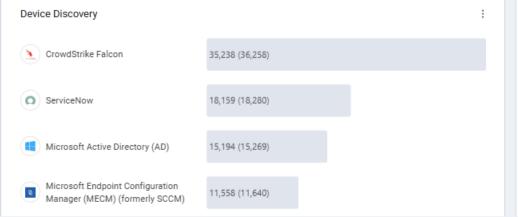
∨ 国 Shared

☐ All Vulnerabilities

BB HVERS - Vulnerabilities

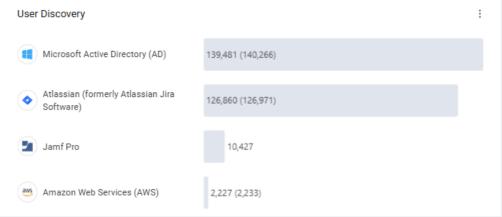




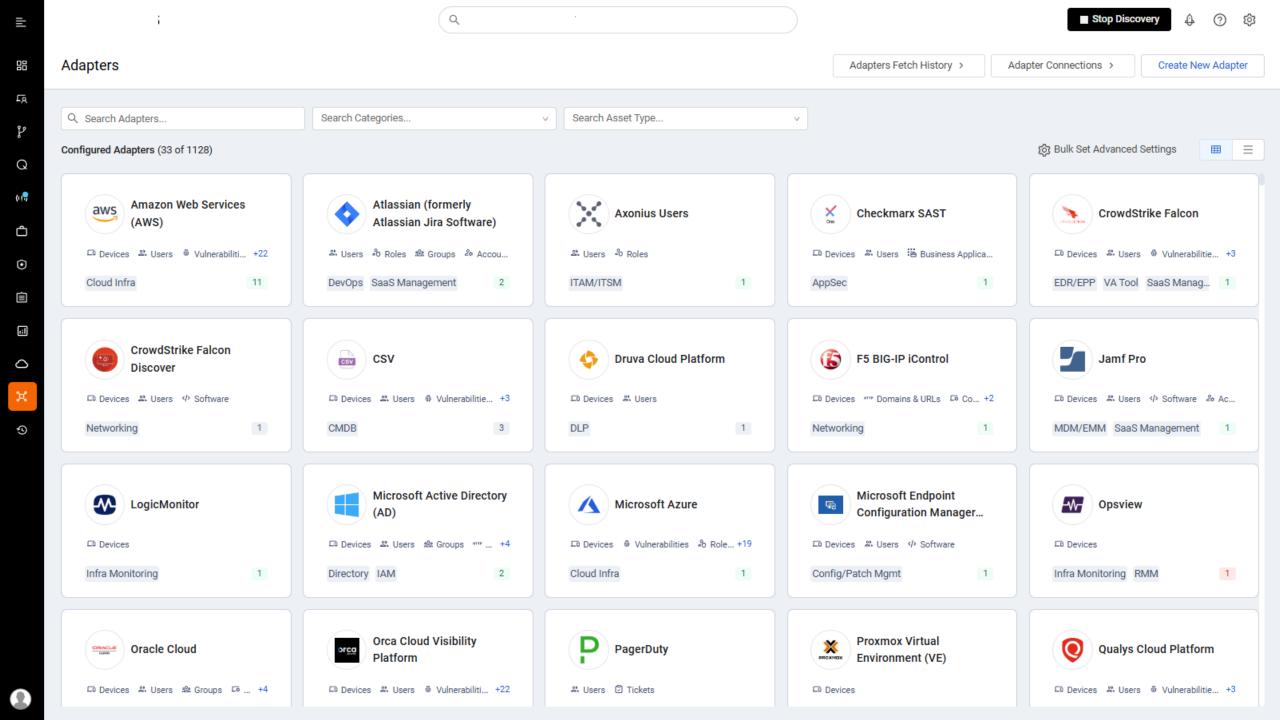


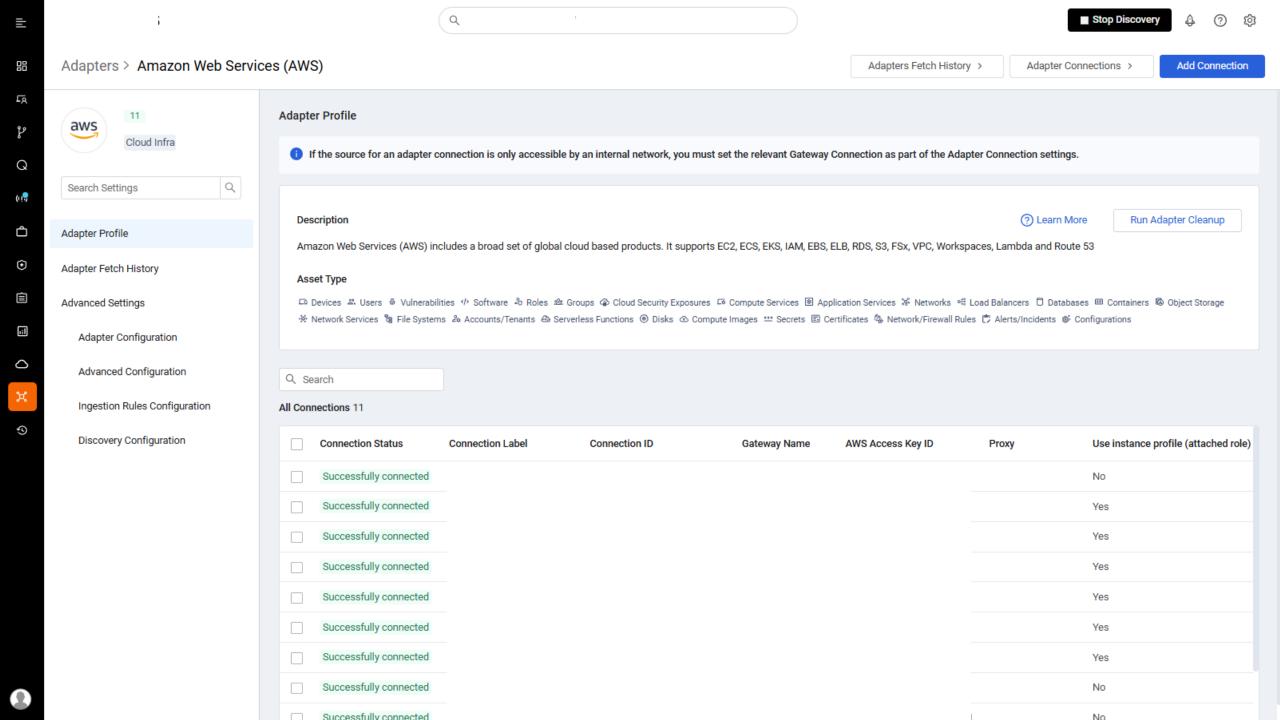
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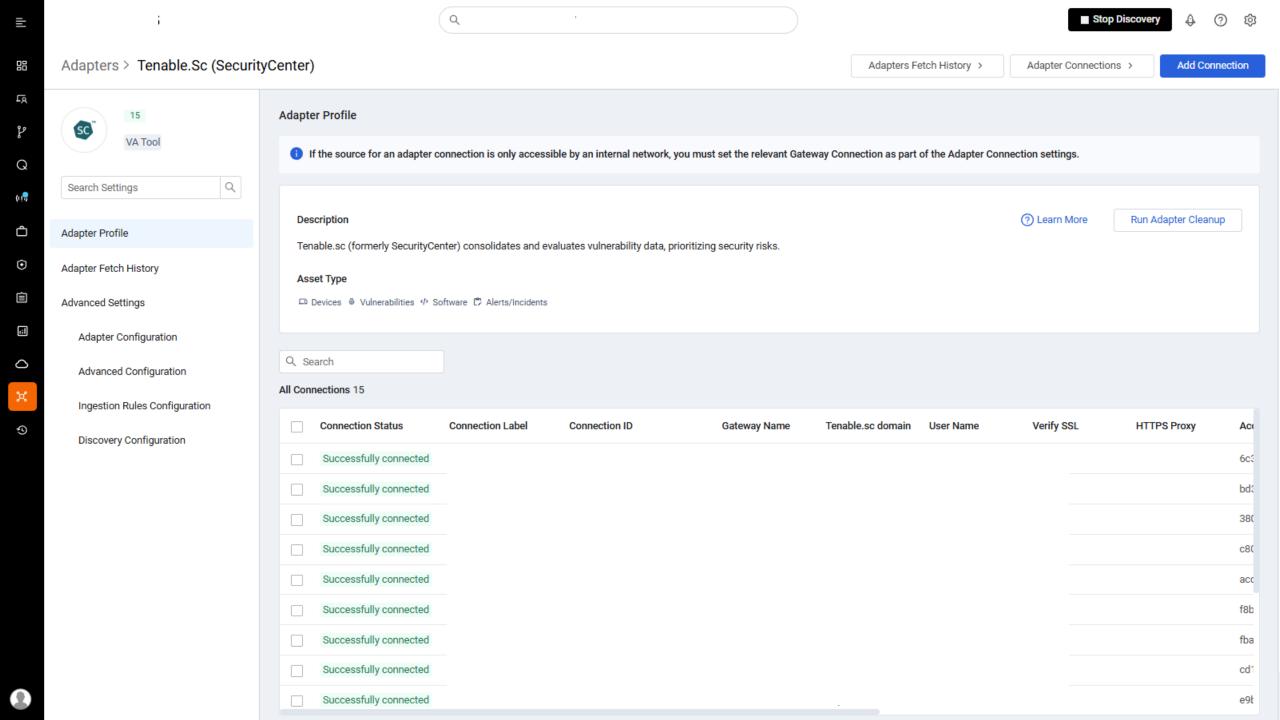
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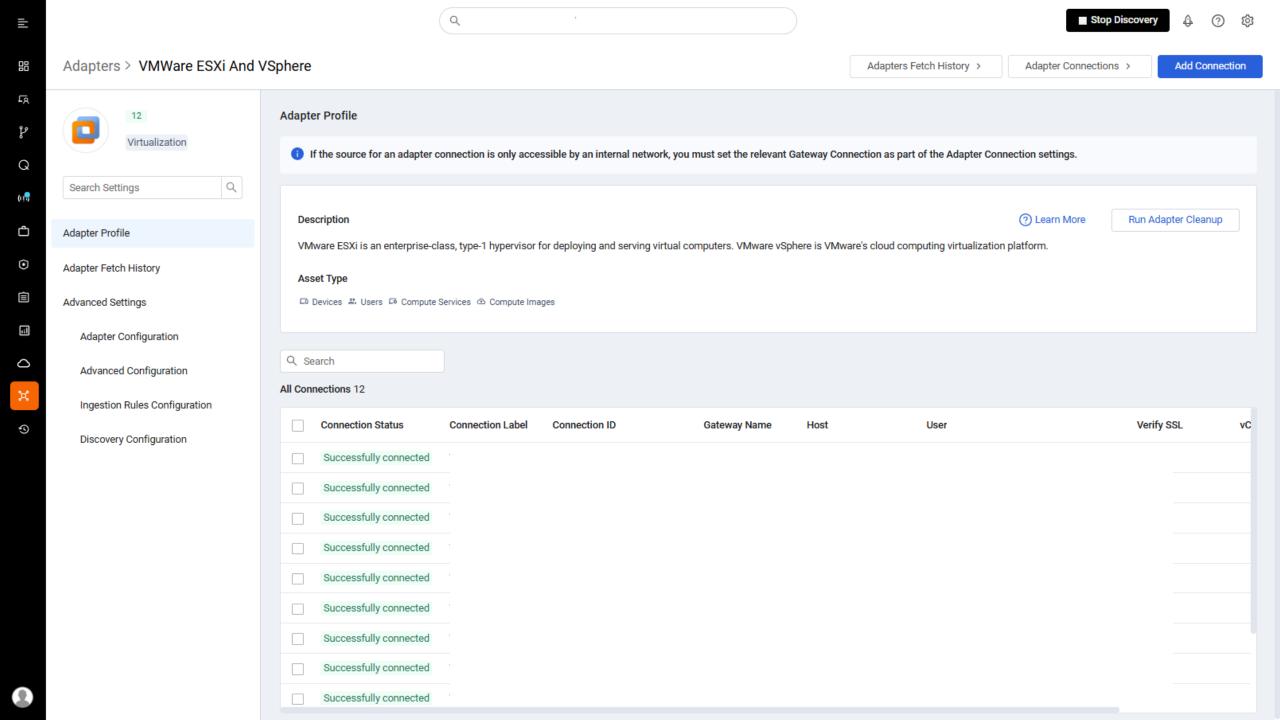


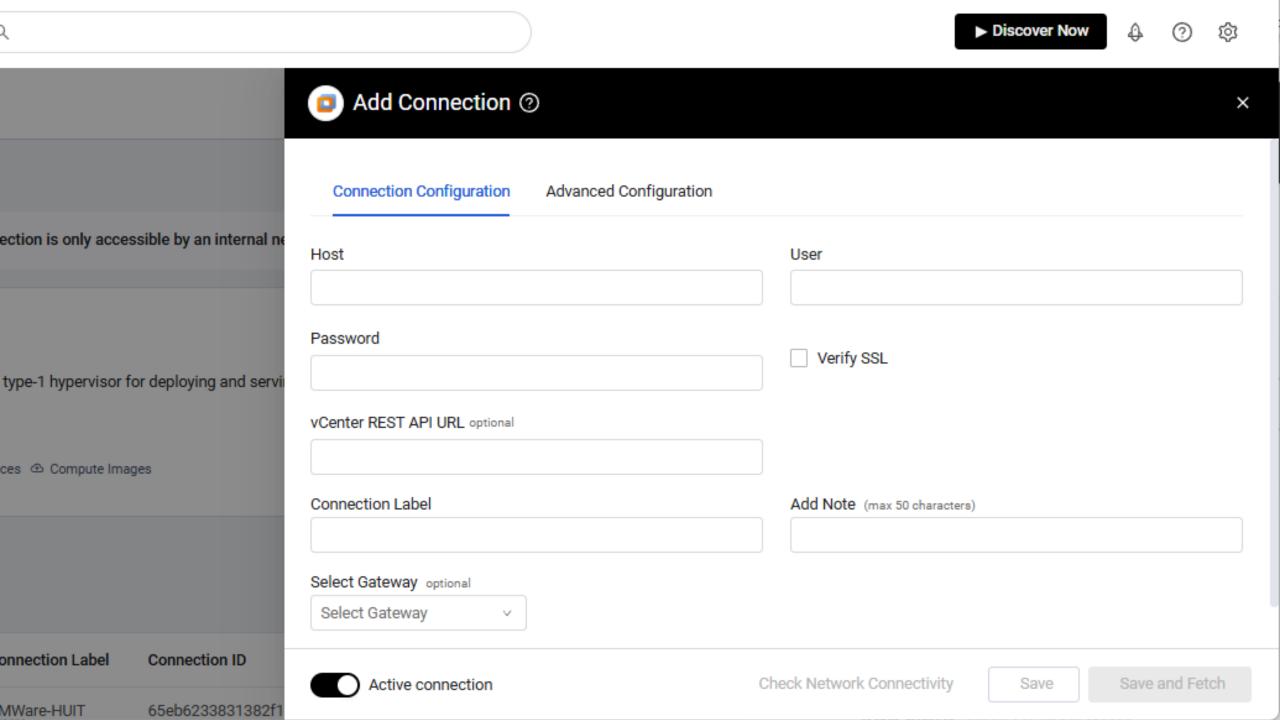


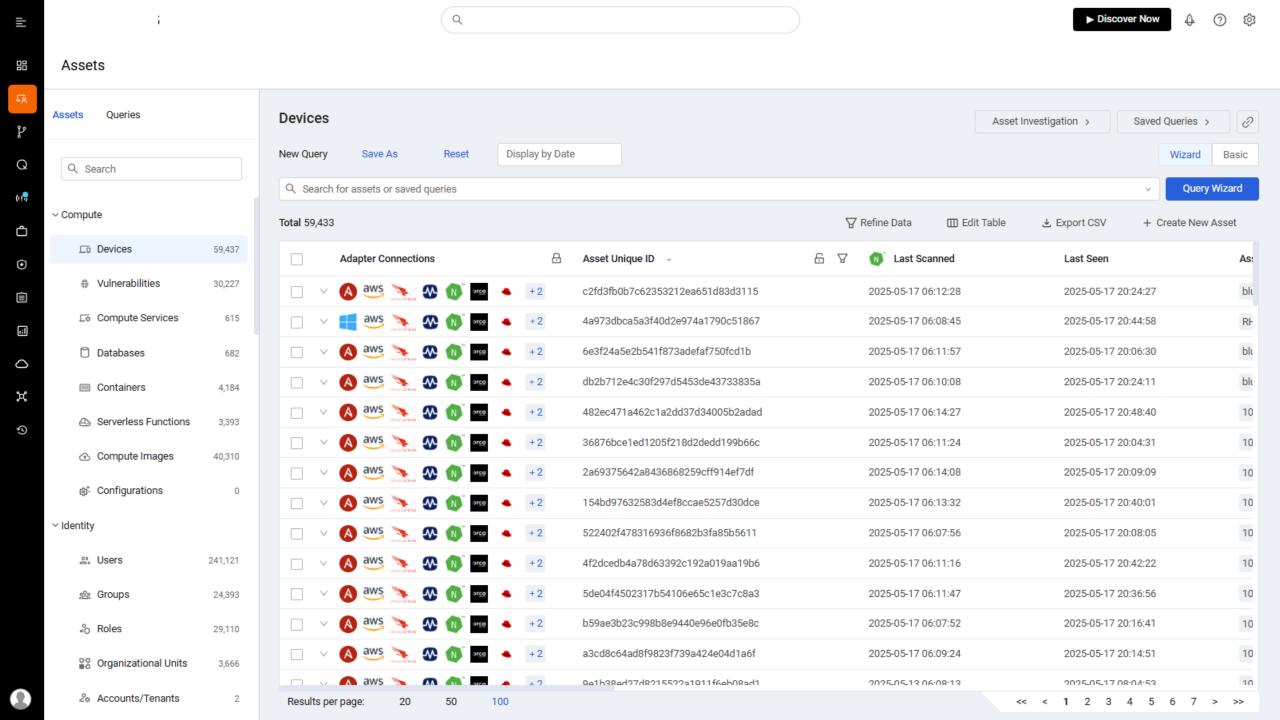


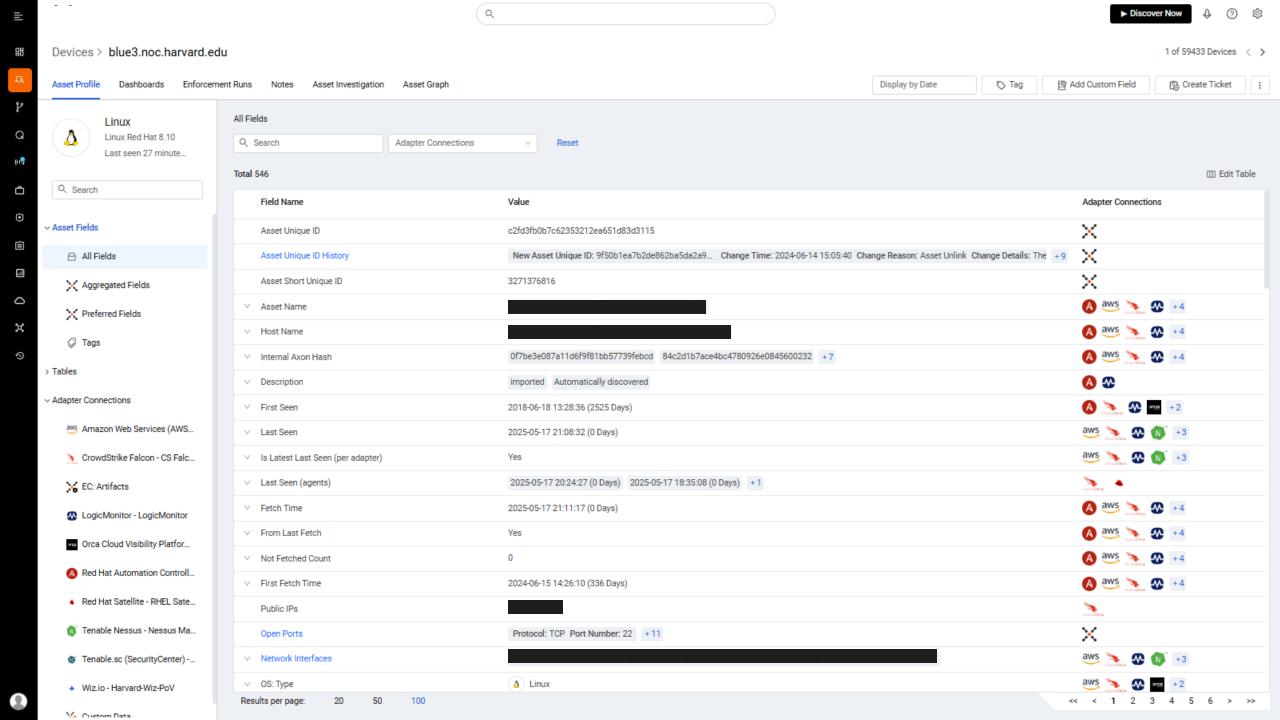


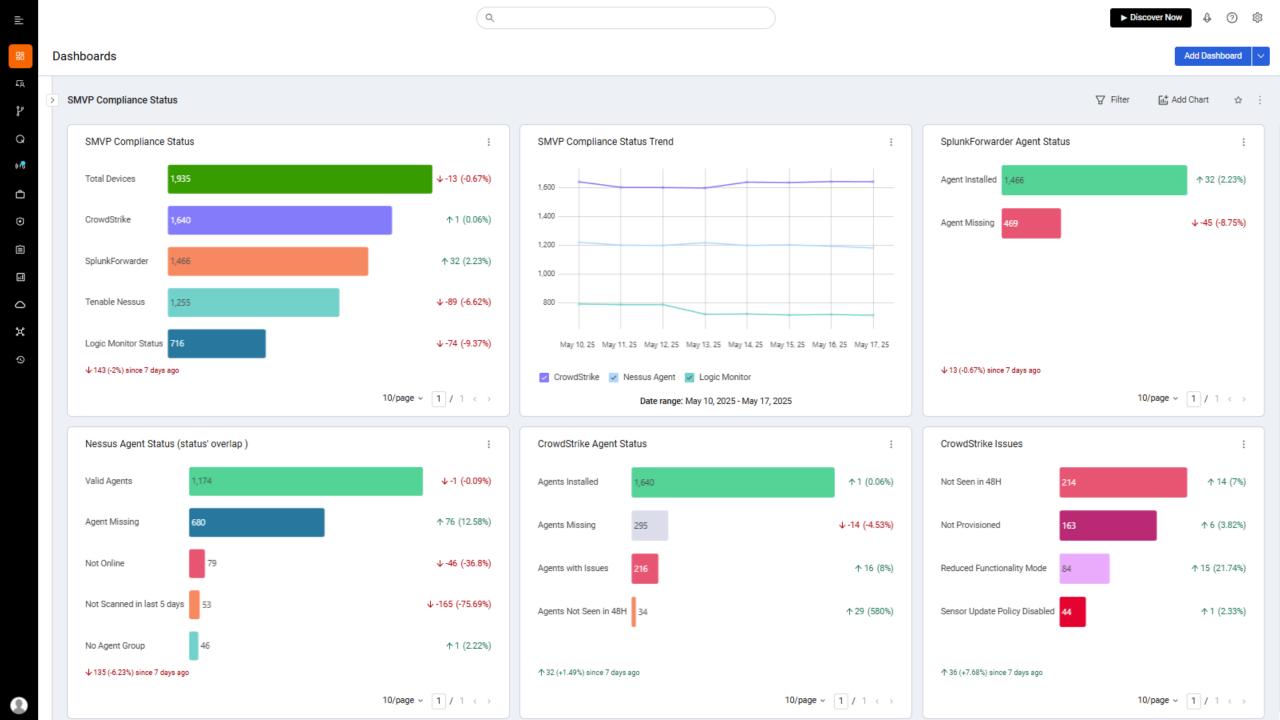


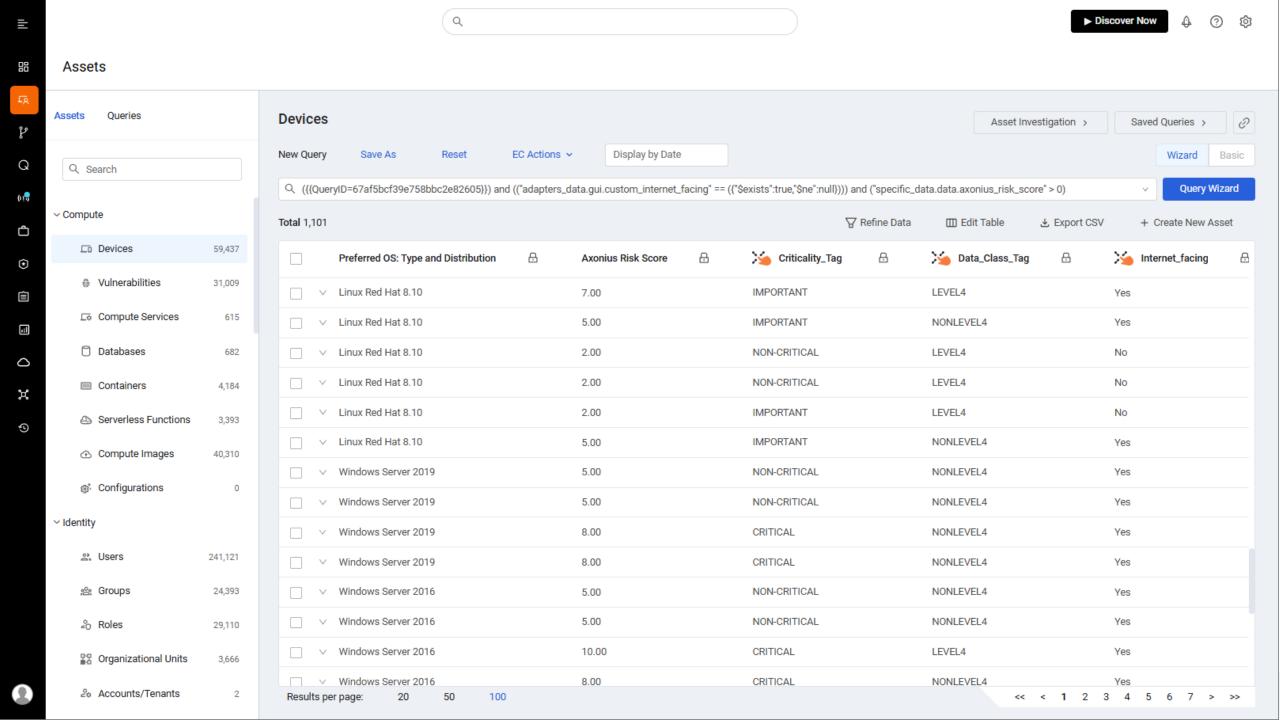




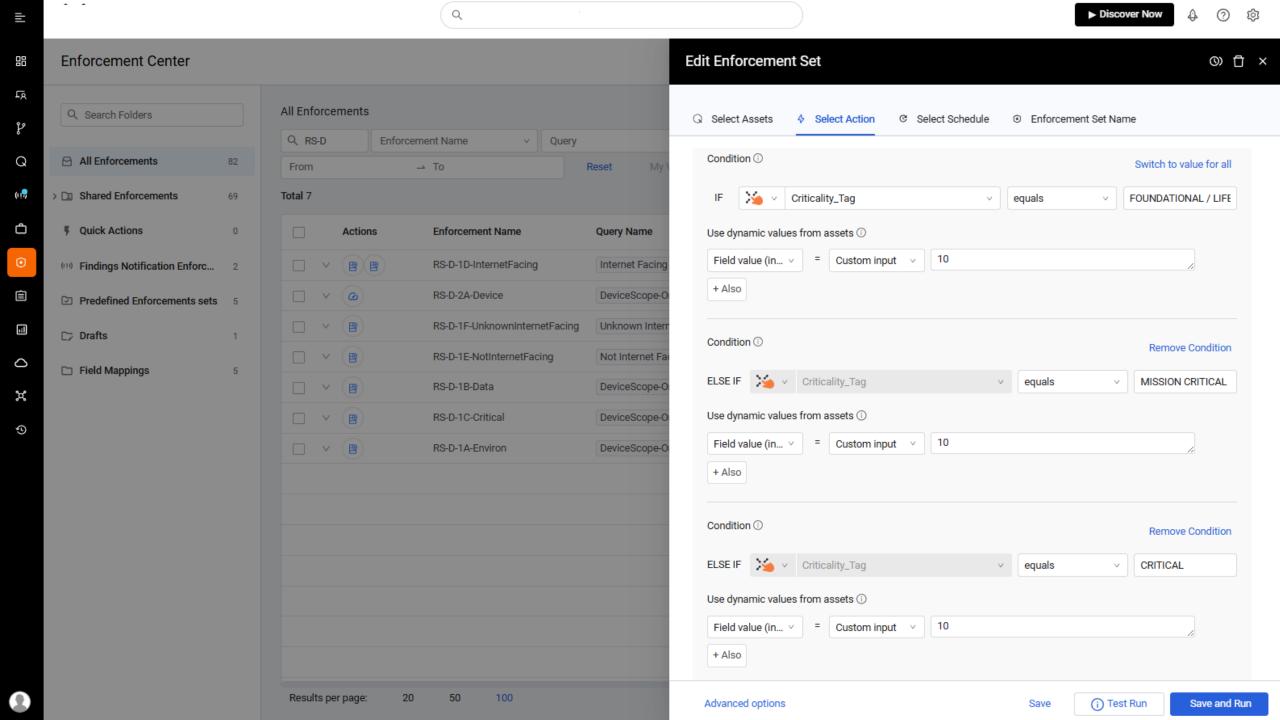


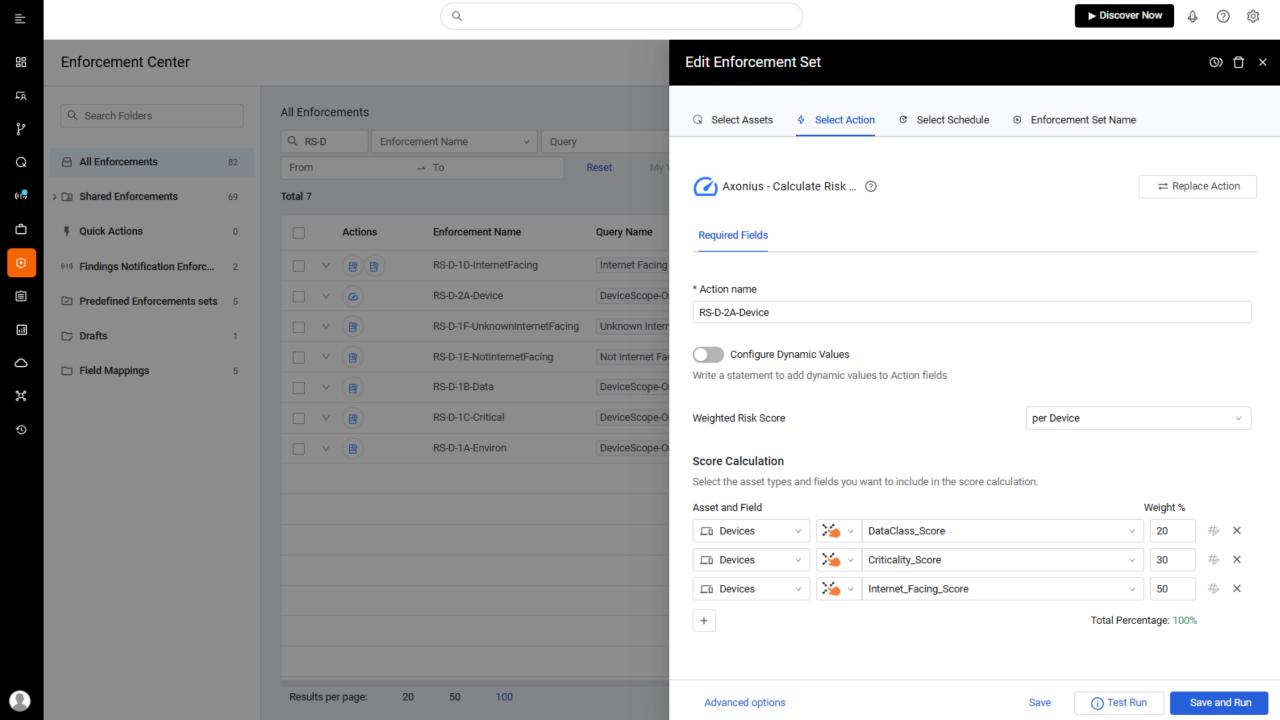


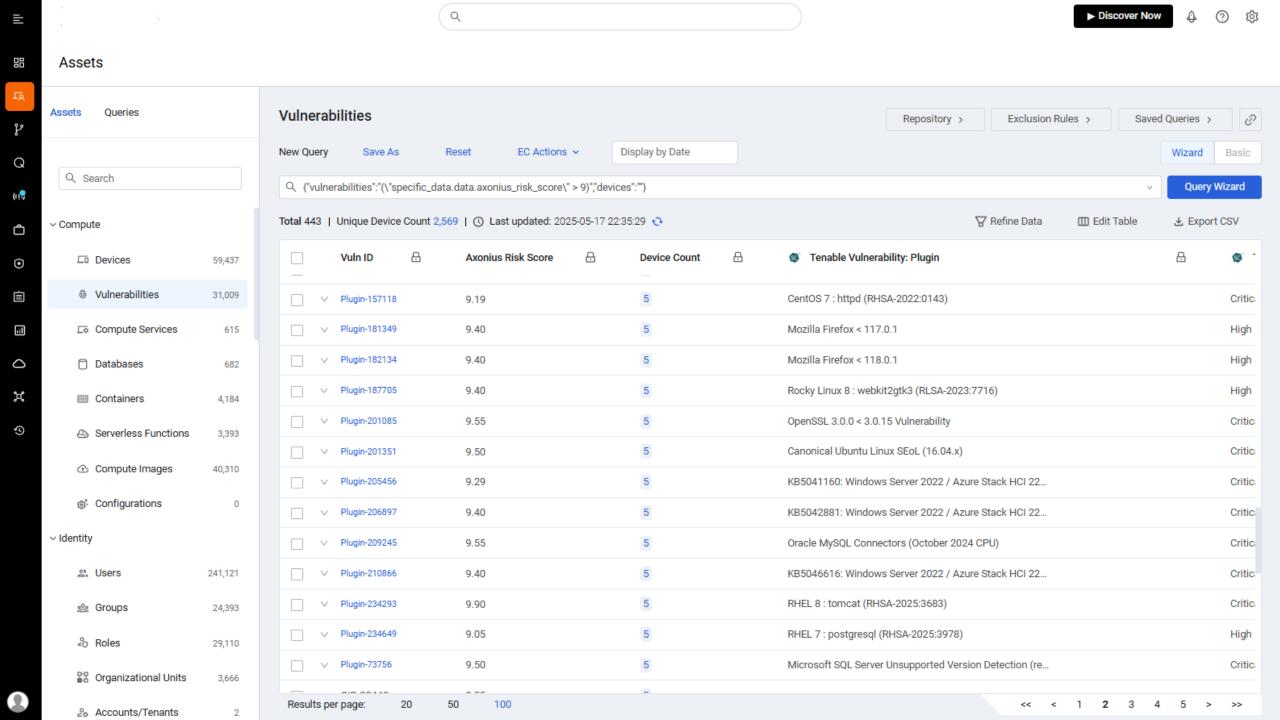


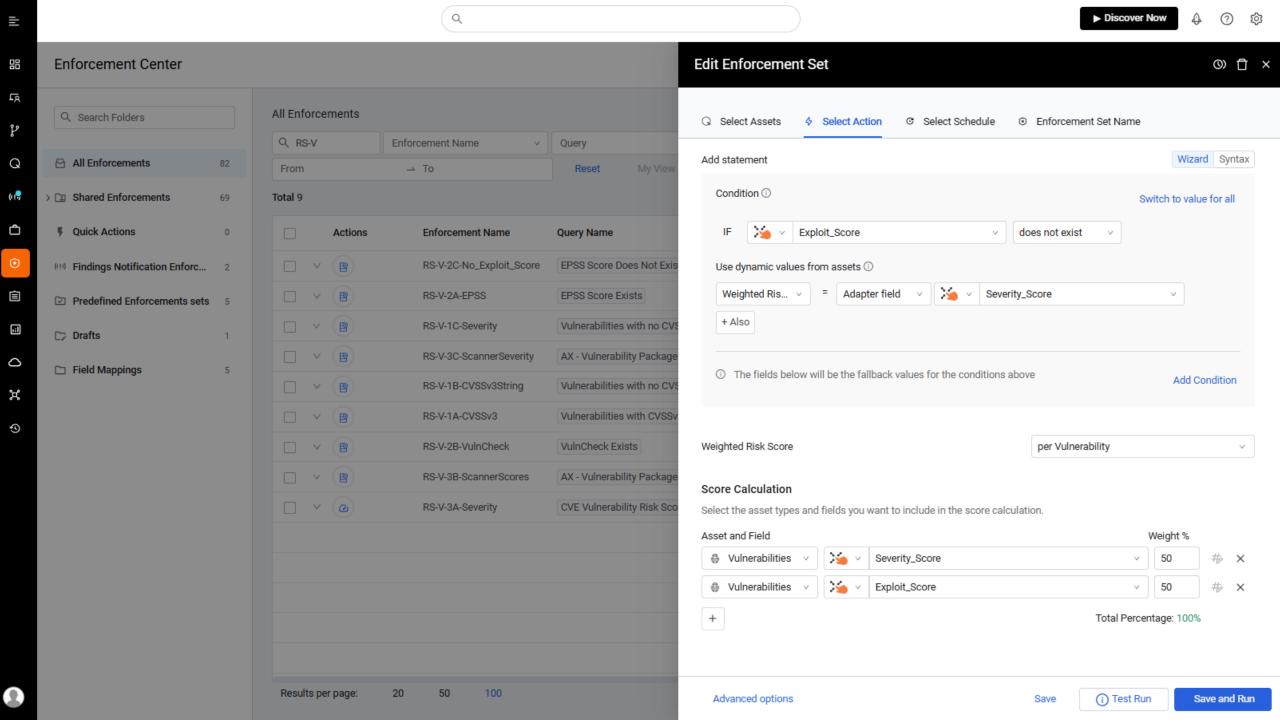


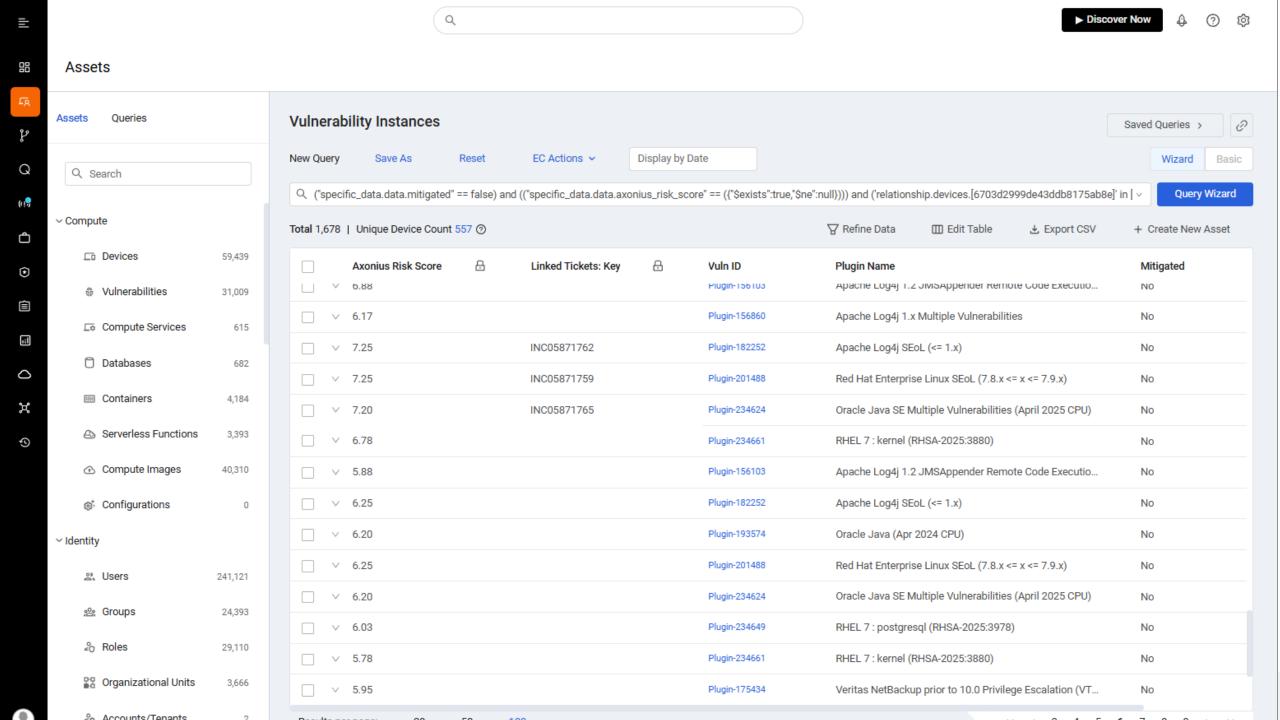
	Actions	Enforcement Name	Query Name	Scheduling Type	Last Run Status	Last Run
_ v		RS-D-1D-InternetFacing	Internet Facing for Onboarded Schools	Every 12 hours	Completed	2025-05-17 20:00:23
_ v	(a)	RS-D-2A-Device	DeviceScope-Onboarded Schools	Every 1 days; at 06:00	Partially	2025-05-17 02:00:18
_ v		RS-D-1F-UnknownInternetFacing	Unknown Internet Facing Devices for Onboarded Schools	Every 12 hours	Completed	2025-05-17 20:00:21
		RS-D-1E-NotInternetFacing	Not Internet Facing Devices for Onboarded Schools	Every 12 hours	Completed	2025-05-17 20:00:21
_ v		RS-D-1B-Data	DeviceScope-Onboarded Schools	Every 1 days; at 05:15	Completed	2025-05-17 01:15:03
_ v	B	RS-D-1C-Critical	DeviceScope-Onboarded Schools	Every 1 days; at 05:20	Completed	2025-05-17 01:20:02
_ v		RS-D-1A-Environ	DeviceScope-Onboarded Schools	Every 1 days; at 05:05	Completed	2025-05-17 01:05:02
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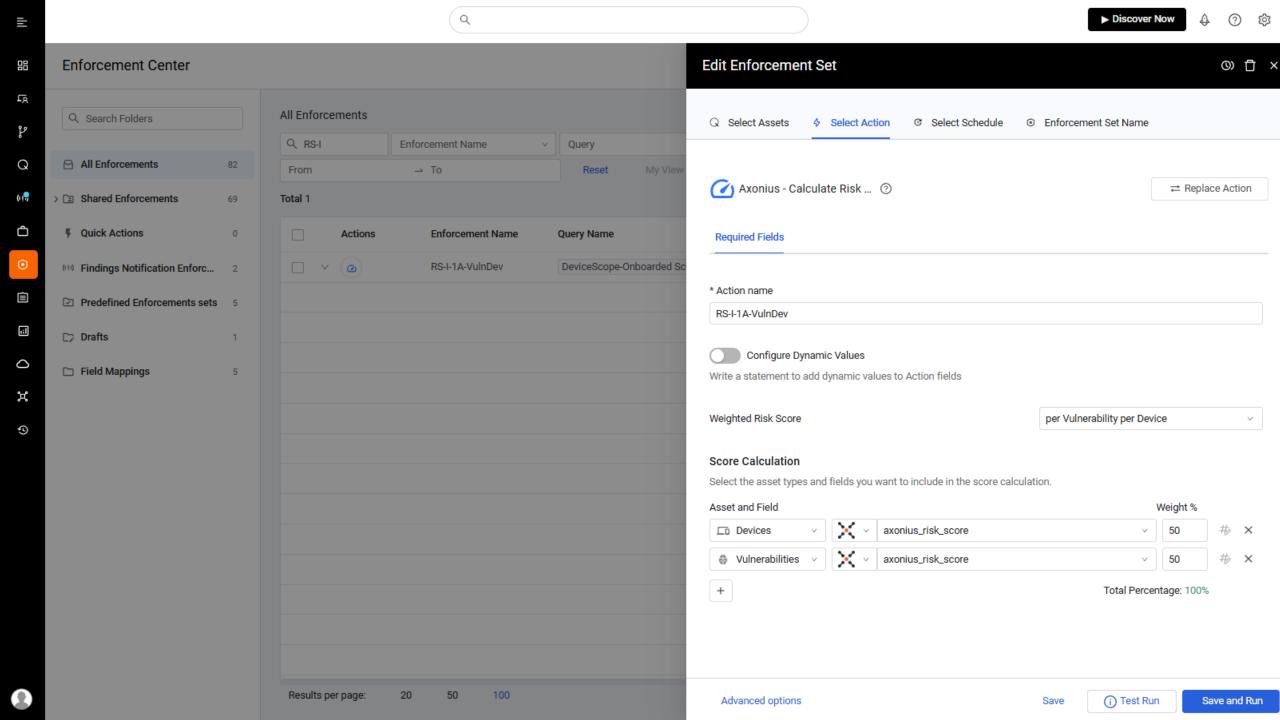


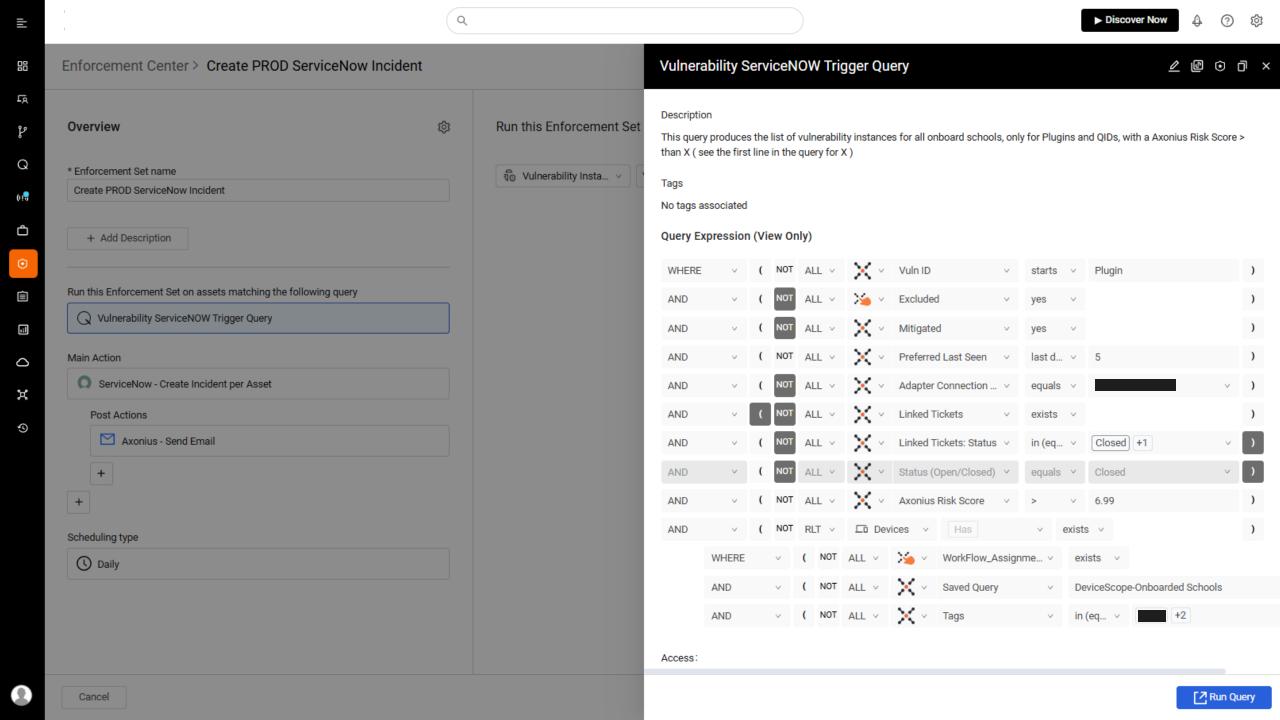


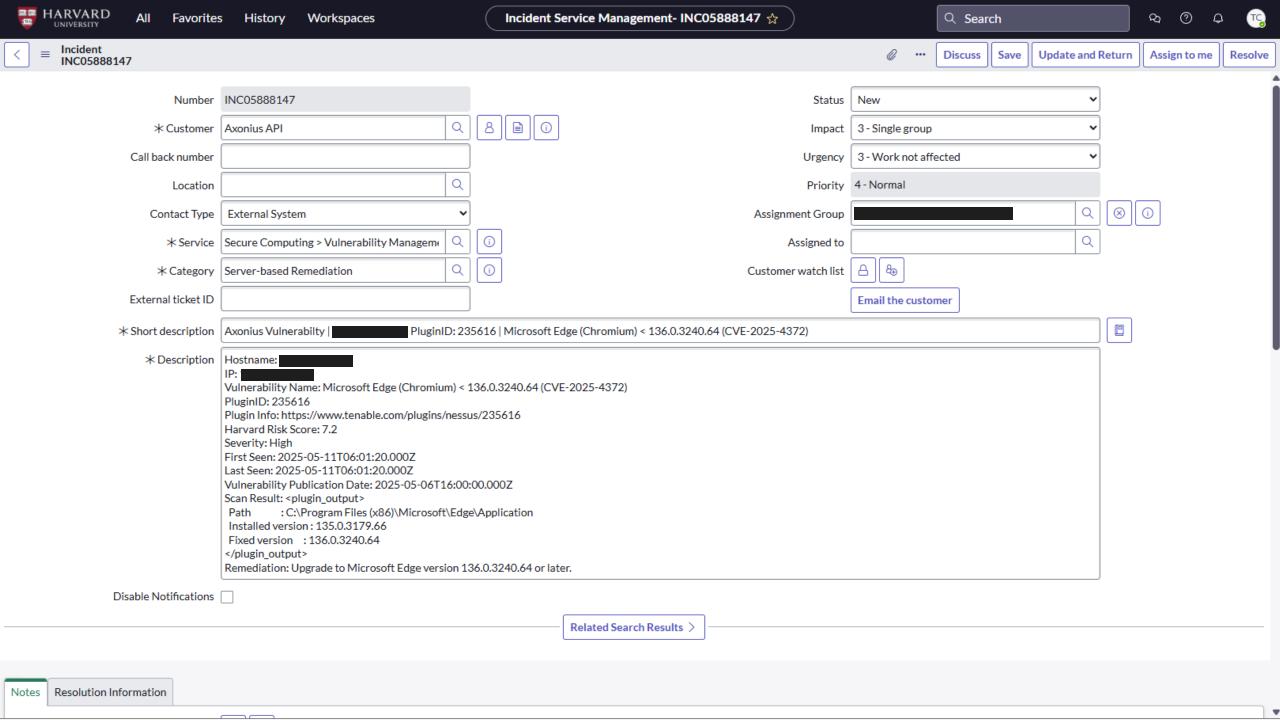


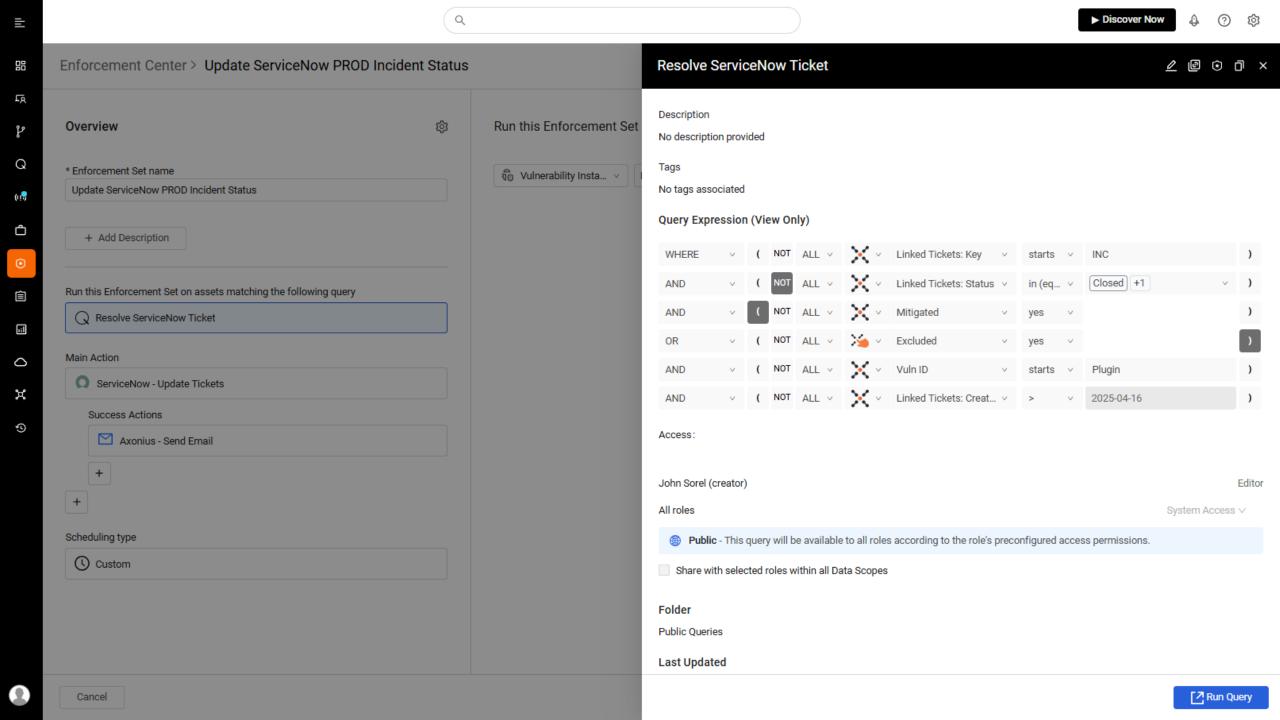


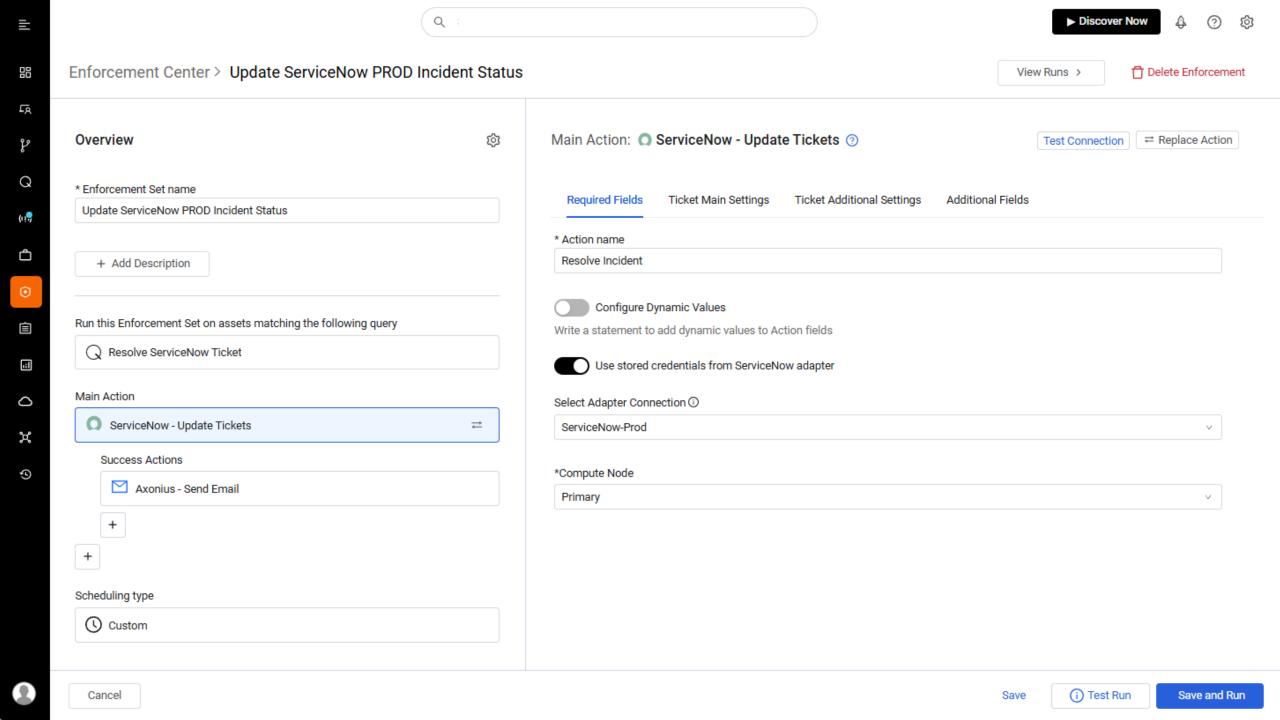


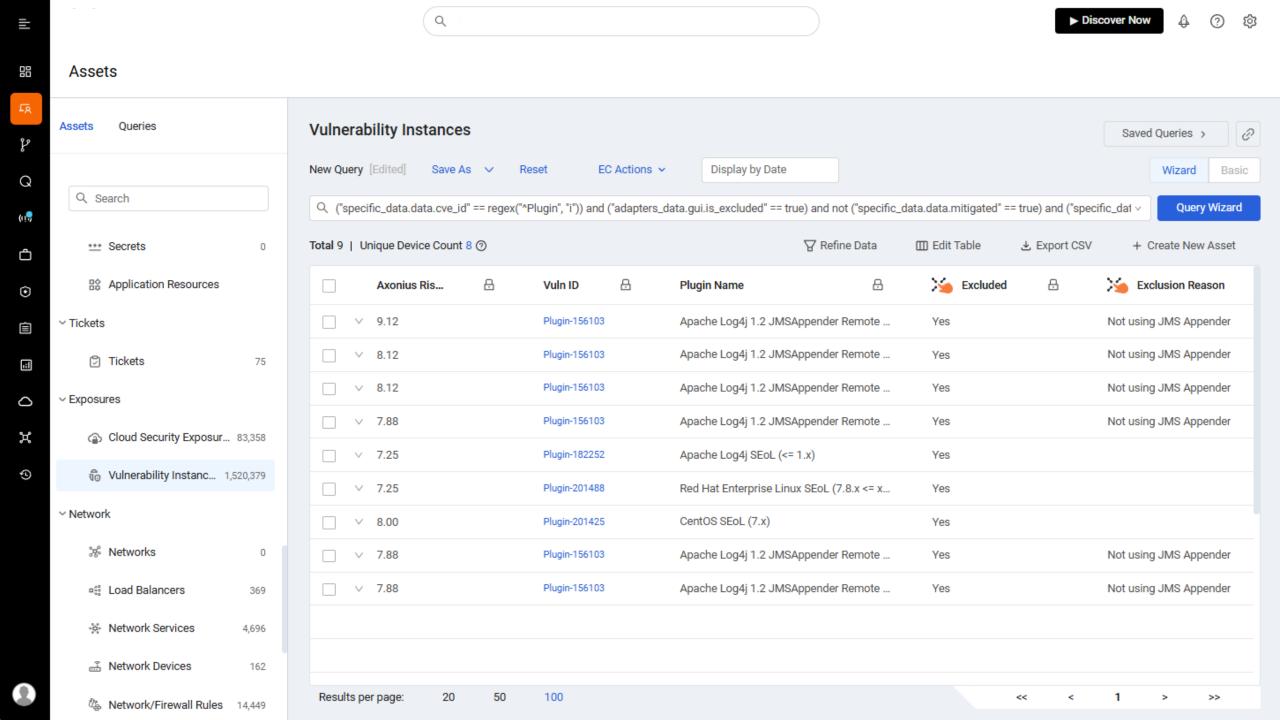


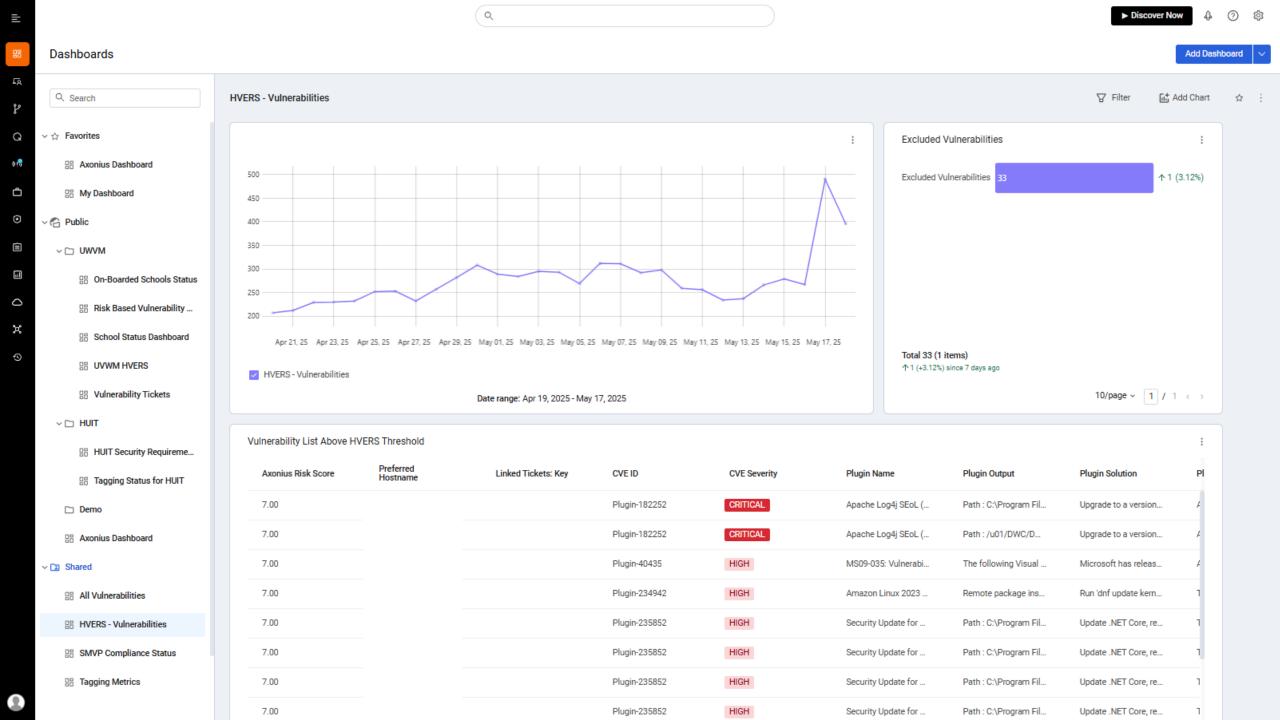












Lessons Learned

Cultural Shift > Technology
 Change: New mindset around
 vulnerability = potential business
 risk.

Clear Risk Language:
 Translating technical risk into operational terms for leadership.

• Piloting is Key: Start small, scale after success.

 Data Quality Matters: Garbage in = garbage out. Asset inventories needed upgrades first

 Celebrate Wins: Even small improvements kept momentum.





Lessons Learned: Spotlight on Change Management

Engaged partners early

Communicated with a consistent message

Took hands-on approach to training and design workshops

Leadership adopted role of change champions

Promoted feedback loop to drive continuous improvement



Conclusion



- Risk-based vulnerability management (RBVM) EQUALS smarter security
- RBVM is a culture shift, every day is an opportunity to build on risk awareness
- Thank You!
- Open for Questions



Contact Information

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