



Municipal government with limited IT resources uses Google Message Discovery to archive email and protect users from offensive spam

BUSINESS



Company: City of Monroe, Washington

Location: Monroe, Washington

Industry: Government

Users: 130 city government employees and elected officials

Challenges: The City of Monroe posted its employees' and elected officials' email addresses on its web site – to disastrous results. Without a spam filter, the City's email servers were constantly crashing under the volume of spam and users were inundated with 'bad' email. City employees were wasting a tremendous amount of time and money sifting through their inboxes and manually deleting 'bad' – often offensive – email.

Results: Google Message Security immediately reduced the number of offensive and often pornographic, spam that reached the City's email servers by 95 percent. The productivity of city employees improved instantly. After adding message archiving capabilities, the City can now respond to public disclosure requests more quickly and easily.

“With Google Message Discovery, a request for public disclosure that previously would have taken days to meet now takes a matter of minutes.”

Denise Bremner
IT Manager

Challenge

Tucked in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains east of Seattle, the City of Monroe, Washington is the center of commerce for Eastern Snohomish County and used to be home to the Carnation Dairy. All told, the city has 110 government employees, including public works, law enforcement, and all the departments within City Hall, for which it provides IT services and support, including email. In addition, the city also provides email accounts for approximately 20 city council members and other elected officials.

In late 2003, a virtual deluge of spam was nearly paralyzing the city's servers. Recalls Denise Bremner, IT Manager for the City of Monroe, “From the minute we published our employees' email addresses on our website, the volume of spam hitting our servers – and reaching our users' inboxes – became unbearable. We were just bombarded. We were using a spam filtering system at the server level, however, quite a bit of spam was still getting through. At that point, we realized we had to do something else.”

Solution

Because the City of Monroe's IT department is small – just three full-time staffers – ease of management and use was at the top of Bremner's list of evaluation criteria for a spam filtering solution. The limited IT staff combined with the fact that the city's users were geographically dispersed in different buildings around town helped Bremner narrow her choices down to managed services offerings. “Initially, we looked at some appliances, but, at the time, we only had two people in the IT department and they were doing everything from maintaining the City's web site to making sure the mobile computers in the police cruisers worked properly,” says Bremner. “We needed something we wouldn't have to worry about and that would stop the spam from hanging our email servers. So we decided to look at managed services.”

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After evaluating a few options, Bremner settled on Google Message Security, powered by Postini. Bremner explains why: “Our primary goal was to screen emails before they hit our server and eliminate potential viruses and spam from our network. Google Message Security seemed like a good fit for our needs and it has proven us right.”

In fact, Bremner has been so pleased with Google Message Security that she turned to Google again in late 2007 when she faced email archiving challenges. “Much of our email, especially those to and from elected officials and city council members, is subject to public disclosure requests. Everything we send on email is a matter of

ABOUT GOOGLE APPS SECURITY AND COMPLIANCE

Google Apps security and compliance products, powered by Postini, are available to businesses and organizations who want to make their existing email infrastructures more secure, compliant, and productive. The message security products protect you from spam and messaging threats. The compliance products enable you to enforce message policy and content management, archive messages with discovery services, as well as secure your web browsing and encrypt your sensitive email. As a service, there is nothing to install or maintain, so you can start small and implement additional services as your requirements grow.

For more information, visit
www.google.com/a/security

public record,” notes Bremner. “We heard that Google provided a message archiving system that would help us centralize our messages in one place and be much faster to search, so we decided to upgrade to Google Message Discovery and we couldn’t be happier.”

Benefits

Adding messaging archiving to the City of Monroe’s existing Google service was simple. “We just upgraded all of our elected officials and staff to Google Message Discovery. It couldn’t have been easier,” says Bremner. “Plus, now we can quickly meet disclosure requirements as well as protect users from harmful and offensive spam messages.”

With Google Message Discovery, Bremner can ensure she captures all email required to meet a public disclosure request – in a fraction of the time it used to take. “In the past, when someone filled out a disclosure request asking for all emails from, for example, a specific staff member to a city council member, we had to manually search multiple email servers and archives, which is very time-consuming,” notes Bremner. “Now, rather than search for email on the hard drive, on the server, and on backup drives, all we have to do is run a quick search with the specific criteria. With Google Message Discovery, a request for public disclosure that previously would have taken days to meet now takes a matter of minutes.”

Bremner also likes the fact that her staff can configure settings for different groups of users quickly and easily. “The flexibility of going to the administrator site and being able to add people to the white list, block people from sending email, and add message archiving capability for specific users is key” notes Bremner. “With the different constituents that we serve – from those employees who sit within City Hall to police officers on the street to elected officials – we need to be able to customize the Google service for each user, and we need to do it quickly and easily.”

Results

Since initially deploying Google Message Security in March 2004, Bremner calculates that about 95 percent of email that was spam is now being blocked by the Google service. One of the key types of spam that is not offending users anymore is pornographic spam. Says Bremner, “A lot of the questionable emails that we used to receive were pornographic and offensive, and we felt that we were liable as a city if we did not protect our users from this type of mail,” says Bremner. “Between eliminating the pornographic spam and improving our users’ productivity, the Google service paid for itself in a short period of time.”

At the end of the day, Bremner views the Google Apps security and compliance services as one of the best IT investments she has made in the past few years. “Between filtering out all the spam we used to get and helping us respond more quickly to disclosure requests, Google saves us a lot of time and money.”

