

Google Apps security lets Fordham University students and faculty focus on academics instead of spam



BUSINESS



Company: Fordham University

Location: New York, New York

Industry: Education

Users: 30,000 students, faculty and staff

Challenges: Fordham University's email servers were crushed under the growing volume of spam, slowing email delivery to a halt and impacting performance and productivity of both students and faculty.

Results: Since implementing Google Message Filtering, Fordham University has been able to reduce the amount of time IT staff spends monitoring and maintaining spam-related issues, lowered the number of calls to the university's help desk, and improved the performance of the email system.

“The amount of time we spend with the Google service is almost non-existent. In fact, it’s so effortless that we only occasionally need to login to the administrative interface to make modifications.”

Jason Benedict
Information Security Officer

Challenge

True to the academic tradition, over 15,000 students and hundreds of faculty at Fordham University, the thriving New York City liberal arts institution, had a free and open email system that did not filter either incoming or outgoing messages. But by mid-2005, the volume of spam was unmanageable. Remembers Jason Benedict, Fordham’s University Information Security Officer, “We were processing 99 percent spam and only one percent legitimate email. Our systems had become so overwhelmed by spam and spam processing that we suffered frequent failures of our email system as well as tremendous slowdowns in email delivery and, subsequently, in performance and productivity.”

First, Benedict and his team implemented real-time blackhole lists, or RBLs, a freeware solution, to try to handle the spam load, although they took a somewhat conservative approach and only “tagged” the spam rather than quarantining or completely blocking the unauthorized messages. Even with RBLs, Benedict says “the spam still found its way to our SMTP gateways and had to be processed. Therefore, this solution did nothing to relieve the pressure and strain on our systems.” At this point, it was clear Fordham had to take a new tactic to getting its users – and systems – focused on academics again, and not on processing spam.

“Because Google Message Filtering allows individuals to customize the level of spam protection they desire, our IT staff can err on the side of caution, while those users interested in a freer, less restrictive email experience can do so at their own discretion.”

Solution

Benedict surveyed the anti-spam market and created a requirements list for a new email filtering solution. He knew he wanted a solution that would not require any onsite software or hardware, was easy to deploy, and required little or no ongoing maintenance for his relatively small IT staff.

After evaluating several of the leading email filtering products and services on the market, Benedict and his team selected Google Message Filtering, powered by Postini. In addition to the fact that it is a hosted solution that requires no onsite hardware or software and its deployment time was literally hours, Benedict noted that the solution’s configurability and flexibility also sold him on Google. “Because Google Message Filtering allows individuals to customize the level of spam protection they desire, our IT staff can err on the side of caution, while those users interested in a freer, less restrictive email experience can do so at their own discretion,” says Benedict. “Google Message Filtering gives us the best of both worlds.”

Finally, another selling point for Benedict is that Google Message Filtering only scans and processes inbound messages, without filtering or examining those leaving the university, which was deemed desirable by the university community at Fordham.

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

Results

Because Google Message Filtering requires no internal hardware or software, Fordham's IT staff has been able to focus on keeping its network and systems functioning properly rather than on fighting fires. Says Benedict, "We no longer need to throw additional staff at maintaining an email system pushed to its limits by spam. Today, our limited staff can handle the support tasks required to keep everything running smoothly."

Benedict raves about the lack of time needed to maintain the Google Message Filtering service: "The amount of time we spend with the Google service is almost non-existent," he says. "The product takes care of itself; we set it and forget it. In fact, it's so effortless that we only occasionally need to login to the administrative interface to make modifications."

In terms of quantifiable results, Benedict notes that spam-related calls to the university's help desk have decreased dramatically since the deployment of Google Message Filtering. "Spam-related calls to the help desk dropped 99 percent, from more than 100 per week down to less than a few calls per month," comments Benedict.

At the end of the day, Benedict is thrilled with the results he sees within the Fordham University network and the higher availability and faster throughput of his email servers afforded by Google Message Filtering. Plus, he feels confident that the entire Google technical support staff is behind him. Concludes Benedict, "Google technical support is among the best I have ever dealt with in the industry. I have never come across someone what wasn't knowledgeable, eager to help, knew the product, and even knew my account. What more can I ask for?"

