

Schools Switch to Trend Micro™ InterScan™ Messaging Hosted Service to Solve Spam Problem

South Washington County Schools in Minnesota rely on a multilayered security strategy to avoid viruses and malware attacks, and to keep unwanted content out of the classrooms. In recent years, spam has escalated and the new school year brought it to crisis level. Thousands of spam emails were getting through each day, and students, teachers, administrators, and even the district superintendent felt the impact. By switching to a hosted email security solution from Trend Micro, the district was able to virtually eliminate spam.

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SPAM OVERWHELMS THE NETWORK, CALL DESK, AND IT

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— **Jeff Dietsche,**
Manager of Systems
and Networks

South Washington County
Schools, Cottage Grove, MN

Spam has been on the rise, and the IT team at South Washington County School District has deployed multiple layers of defense as part of their overall security solution. Last year, the district was receiving between 300,000 and 400,000 emails a day. The amount of spam was a high percentage that sometimes added up to around 390,000 unwanted emails every day. Even with most of the spam being blocked, there was still too much spam reaching inboxes. Since approximately 1200 users receive the bulk of the email traffic, many people were spending time on spam. Unhappy users often phoned the Call Desk for help or to log complaints. The Call Desk issued trouble “tickets” to IT, and the technical staff was constantly disrupted to troubleshoot.



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KEY BENEFITS

- **Accurate blocking.** Email Reputation, IP Profiler, and the anti-spam engine increased spam blocking to almost 100%.
- **Satisfied users.** End-User Quarantine with custom settings and approved sender lists let users log in and manage their spam.
- **Unburdened staff.** Spam-related “trouble” tickets have been eliminated, reducing the burden on IT and the Call Center.
- **Bandwidth savings.** Spam is blocked before it burdens the network and email servers.

“We watched this all happening, but we felt like we had done everything we could to block spam,” said Jeff Dietsche, manager of systems and networks for the school district. “A Barracuda firewall device was installed at the gateway, Trend Micro mail server and endpoint solutions were deployed on our network, and we took advantage of the Microsoft anti-spam features built into our email system. We were achieving 96–97% catch rates. Still, the sheer volume of our email meant that we were dealing with an unacceptable quantity of spam. When school resumed in the fall, spam rates shot even higher and a barrage of very inappropriate content pushed us to the limit. The superintendent of schools called us and we had to find a solution immediately.”



INTRODUCTION OF A HOSTED SOLUTION

IT turned to Trend Micro for help, and learned about the new Trend Micro InterScan Messaging Hosted Security solution. The hosted solution offered the school several benefits:

- An additional layer of protection blocks spam, viruses, spyware, phishing, and other threats. Email Reputation uses the world’s largest, most trusted reputation database to identify and block spam, while dynamic reputation services stop threats from zombies and botnets as they first emerge. An anti-spam composite engine integrates multiple protective techniques.
- Unwanted email can be filtered out before it reaches the district, offloading on-site devices, email servers, and the network itself.
- Protection levels and filtering policies can be adjusted to satisfy the user base.
- Day-to-day management of the solution by Trend Micro reduces the burden on IT, freeing resources for other projects and issues.



QUICK ACTIVATION AND EASY ONGOING MANAGEMENT

“InterScan Messaging Hosted Security saves network bandwidth, eliminates the burden on our email servers, and totally satisfies our users—the calls that came in to the Call Center during the first weeks of implementation were compliments from users who were thrilled with the results.”

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The urgency of the problem accelerated the evaluation process, and the district signed up for the service without the typical pilot phase for a new technology acquisition. The quick trial and activate features of the hosted service made a rapid startup very easy. All of the district’s email was routed to Trend Micro and the added layer of protection began to yield results immediately. “Since we were worried about the impact of false positives on our users, we started out with moderate levels of filtering,” explained Dietsche. “Over the first four to six weeks, we worked with our Internet service provider and Trend Micro to tune our service and adjust the security levels. The hosted service is very flexible—we can set the conditions and policies that determine the levels of scanning. Today we have turned on the highest settings and it is working perfectly for us. We have eliminated almost 100% of the spam.”

IT took advantage of many of the default policies provided with InterScan Messaging Hosted Security, eliminating a couple and adding a couple of others. “The service is very flexible—you can add hundreds of policies,” said Dietsche. “But with only two custom policies, we have had great results. Today, I occasionally have to adjust a policy or make an exception for special situations, but I really don’t have to do much at all. Spam used to take up a huge amount of our time in IT, and the hosted service has resulted in major operating expense savings for us. Instead of 10 to 15 spam-related trouble tickets a day,

we now get next to zero. The hosted service has been a great value for us and its also resulted in savings for the Call Center staff and helped all of our users avoid spending time dealing with spam.”

At first, IT kept the existing Barracuda device operating at the gateway, but once the hosted service was fully tuned they were able to eliminate this device completely without diminishing the results. By switching from an appliance to a hosted service solution, the district keeps email threats off the network and offloads IT from future upgrade tasks since Trend Micro manages all upgrades. The hosted service further reduces the day-to-day support burden for the IT staff and Call Center.

END USERS GAIN QUARANTINE CONTROL AND APPROVED SENDER LISTS

The users quickly came to appreciate the features gained with the hosted service. Each user can log in from anywhere on the Internet to access the End User Quarantine and set policies for his or her own inbox. With a minimal amount of training, the users quickly learned to handle false positives, set up approved sender lists, and make other adjustments without requiring help from the Call Center. “InterScan Messaging Hosted Security has taken the pressure off of the Call Center and IT,” said Dietsche. “We never dreamed it would be this good. It’s virtually eliminated all of it without any problems in terms of false positives. Everyone quickly learned the new service and created custom policies. It’s been a tremendous success for us.”

Individual users are happy to manage their own spam policies, and IT has avoided the need to quarantine messages. The small IT staff is completely offloaded from spam issues and users are more empowered.

AN UNEXPECTED BENEFIT—ELIMINATING TARGETED ATTACKS

To switch to the hosted service, IT had to change its firewall and Domain Name Server (DNS) records. Today, the only messages that can pass through the South Washington County School District’s firewall are emails from Trend Micro. “The nice thing about the hosted service is that our firewall is completely locked down now,” explained Dietsche. “In the past, some hackers and spammers were going around our Barracuda firewall—using IP addresses to bypass DNS. Since the Barracuda device doesn’t know where messages are coming from, you can’t avoid this. With Trend Micro InterScan Messaging Hosted Security, nothing can go around our firewall. We’ve eliminated a vulnerability from our messaging systems.”

THE BENEFITS OF A MULTILAYERED SOLUTION

InterScan Messaging Hosted Security is part of a multilayered security strategy for the district. Trend Micro™ ScanMail™ for Microsoft Exchange and OfficeScan™ Client/Server Edition provide messaging and endpoint protection for any virus that makes it onto the district’s network. “If viruses somehow get in, they aren’t going anywhere,” said Dietsche. Since introducing the hosted service, IT has noticed that the other security software solutions are offloaded and do not have to deal with as many threats. By layering solutions, the district benefits from advancements at multiple places in the network and operates from a position of strength against any future threats.

CORPORATE PROFILE

South Washington County Schools Cottage Grove, Minnesota, USA

The suburban South Washington County School District 833 is located southeast of St. Paul, covering an area of 84 square miles. The population of the district is about 95,000, including about 16,400 students in the school district. The sixth largest district in Minnesota, South Washington County Schools strive to create a safe and inclusive climate for learning and to encourage effective communications with the community.

- **Industry/Vertical** Education (K-12)
- **Infrastructure** 22 sites; 3,500 desktops
- www.sowashco.k12.mn.us

For threat filtering, InterScan Messaging Hosted Security integrates layers of security techniques to provide highly effective threat protection. Email Reputation provides a first line of defense, stopping the majority of email threats using global and dynamic reputation databases to evaluate the senders. Email is also filtered through Trend Micro anti-spam and antivirus scanning engines, stopping more spam, viruses, spyware, and phishing. This Trend Micro layered technology approach in the hosted service shields the network, provides highly effective catch rates, and preserves bandwidth, storage, and other network resources. In the case of South Washington County School District, this protection also enabled the district to replace an appliance and provided a greatly simplified solution for IT.

COMPLIMENTS INSTEAD OF COMPLAINTS

Spam continues to escalate, but with its hosted service the district does not see any of it. “It’s fun to look at the console and check the spam levels,” said Dietsche. “Our total email volume has increased by 30% and is now more than 650,000 messages a day—about 640,000 of those messages are spam, but virtually none of it hits our inboxes. The Trend Micro service is now catching the last 2% to 3% (10,000+ spam messages) that used to get through. InterScan Messaging Hosted Security saves us network bandwidth, eliminates the burden on our email servers, and totally satisfies our users—the calls that came in to the Call Center during the first weeks of implementation were compliments from users who were thrilled with the results.”

TREND MICRO PRODUCTS

- Trend Micro InterScan Messaging Hosted Security
<http://www.trendmicro.com/emailservices>



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