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Group Leader, IT Department
University of Canterbury

PreciseMail Anti-Spam Gateway Earns High Marks from the University of Canterbury's IT Department



Background

The University of Canterbury is located in Christchurch, the largest city on New Zealand's South Island. They offer a wide variety of subjects in flexible degree structures. The University of Canterbury offers first and postgraduate degrees in Arts, Commerce, Education, Engineering, Fine Arts, Forestry, Law, Music and Science.

Spam Rose to an Unacceptable Level

“The University of Canterbury first attempted to reduce spam two years ago” said Malcolm Smeaton, group leader of the IT department at the University. Although there were several anti-spam tools being used, spam still continued to increase to an unacceptable level. Malcolm estimated that the university's 20,000-user community was receiving a total of 50,000 spam messages per day and it was growing exponentially. “Spam was having a major

impact on the productivity of the IT department and the Helpdesk. We were receiving daily complaints from both the staff and students,” said Malcolm. He added, “It was time-consuming to address all the complaints. I was spending one day a week on spam-related issues because the existing anti-spam tools required manual tuning. Also, over time these tools were not as effective as we needed them to be. Soon after I tuned the filters, the spammers would find a way to circumvent them. These anti-spam tools made us reactive to the spam issue. We needed a solution that would be more proactive at stopping spam.”

Initially, the University of Canterbury had a subscription to a blacklist service and was using the PMDF Sieve feature to filter spam. Both of these solutions filtered a substantial amount of spam and are still used today at the University. “In the short-term, the blacklist is good at stopping spam from specific sites until the spammers alter their address. The PMDF Sieve feature was also used to eliminate more obvious spam. The issue is that none of these techniques are adaptive enough to keep up with the various sophisticated spam techniques,

such as spam with base64 encoded messages and spam that is hidden by bogus HTML code which scrambles letters and numbers,” said Malcolm.

In addition to handling complaints from staff and students, Malcolm began to see evidence of this growing issue by the increasing amount of spam appearing in the public mailing lists he managed and by the increasing consumption of system resources. Malcolm added, “Spammers tend to forge their address and send mail to invalid email addresses which produces a non-delivery receipt. As a result, the mail queue grew from 1,000 messages per day to 12 times that amount. Although there was sufficient disk space at the time to absorb this quantity of spam email, it was soon going to reach its limits.”

The University of Canterbury Evaluates Anti-Spam Solutions

Malcolm examined several anti-spam solutions before selecting PreciseMail Anti-Spam Gateway. “The various anti-spam solutions we examined would require additional hardware and a big investment in time to evaluate” said Malcolm. As a long-time PMDF customer of Process Software and Scientific Software and Systems, Process Software’s exclusive distributor in New Zealand, Malcolm decided to evaluate PreciseMail Anti-Spam Gateway. “I found the product easy to install and use. It also did not require additional hardware and was reasonably priced,” said Malcolm.

Although PreciseMail Anti-Spam Gateway provides administrators with the flexibility to customize and tune their spam filter definitions, Malcolm found this was not necessary. “The product is an effective out-of-the-box solution, filtering 98% of the spam,” said Malcolm.

PreciseMail Anti-Spam Gateway enables each of the University’s 20,000 users to customize their spam definition by creating their own blacklists and whitelists, which greatly reduces the chance of false positives (filtering of legitimate email). “With such a diverse range of users in a highly specialized environment, this tool has proved to be invaluable to the University,” said Malcolm. As a result of the user-controlled spam definition feature, Malcolm saves additional time because he can limit the use of the system-wide whitelists and blacklists.

The quarantine feature offered in PreciseMail Anti-Spam Gateway has also relieved Malcolm of unnecessary work. PreciseMail enables messages to be quarantined or deleted at different pre-defined thresholds. Users can retrieve their own email messages from quarantine without the assistance of the IT department or Helpdesk.

Malcolm was also impressed with PreciseMail Anti-Spam Gateway’s reporting capabilities. “I found the reports really interesting. It was sobering to see how much spam the University was receiving. The amount of spam we received varied, but at times it comprised as much as 65% to 75% of our total email,” said Malcolm. PreciseMail Anti-Spam Gateway generates a wide range of statistics including the volume of spam received, the source of spam, the nature of the mail being filtered, and more. Malcolm added, “The reports

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Results

After installing PreciseMail Anti-Spam Gateway, Malcolm noticed there was a dramatic drop in complaints by email users and his workload decreased. Malcolm stated, "I no longer spend one day per week on spam-related issues. Plus the Helpdesk has experienced similar time savings. I feel more positive about spam in general. It wasn't until PreciseMail came along that I could offer users a positive solution to ongoing complaints."

Malcolm added, "There has been little noticeable impact on system performance and resources. In fact some of the additional system requirements used to run PreciseMail Anti-Spam Gateway has been offset because the number of messages in the queue diminished. The product does not attempt to deliver messages to non-deliverable email addresses. In addition, I can update the spam filters without shutting down or restarting any systems."

About Process Software

Process Software has been a premier supplier of communications software solutions to mission critical environments for twenty years. We were early innovators of email software and anti-spam technology. Process Software has a proven track record of success with thousands of customers, including many Global 2000 and Fortune 1000 companies.



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