

University of Ulster

HIGHER EDUCATION

As the largest university in the island of Ireland, the University of Ulster is an important contributor to education and research in the region. In response to the increasing threat of spam and viruses, the university uses Sophos PureMessage to filter up to 140,000 messages a day, protecting 35,000 mailboxes from email-borne threats. Excellent user acceptance and improved productivity is saving the university up to £240,000 a year.



Magee campus, University of Ulster

Business challenge

The University of Ulster was incorporated in 1984, but its roots go back to the establishment of Magee College in 1865, which is now one of the university's four primary campuses throughout Northern Ireland.

The university is the largest in the island of Ireland, with more than 27,000 students and 3,500 staff. Some 170 undergraduate and postgraduate courses range from Arts, Business and Engineering to Life and Social Sciences. Distance learning is available to the wider community, and local business and industry benefits from the university's major contributions to the region's R&D capacity.

The University of Ulster typically receives between 50,000 and 100,000 emails per day, but traffic can be as high as 140,000 a day. In mid-2003, the Information Services Department (ISD) became increasingly concerned about the productivity losses caused by the rising levels of spam and email viruses being passed through the university's core mail switching architecture.

Key facts

Organisation

University of Ulster

Location

Belfast, N Ireland

No of Mailboxes

35,000

Email traffic

Up to 100,000 per day

Servers

1 dual-CPU Solaris

Solution

PureMessage for UNIX

"Not a single user in the university has asked for email to bypass the protection offered by PureMessage"

Barney Carolan, Hosting Services Leader, Infrastructure Division, University of Ulster

According to Barney Carolan, Hosting Services Leader in the university's Infrastructure Division, "We needed a comprehensive email filtering solution that was robust enough to stand up in a complex enterprise. We considered a number of alternatives, but I had been aware of Sophos PureMessage for some time and was sure that it would do the job for us.

Technology solution

After just a month's trial Carolan was convinced. He extended the initial pilot from four users to 60, using PureMessage's simple "tag and pass" facility to notify recipients of potential spam. Following agreement by the university's IT policy committee to the principle of email content filtering, and a specific request by the University Senate that email be filtered for spam, PureMessage was rolled out to over 30,000 email users.

PureMessage was installed with its default configuration, except that the spam threshold was raised from 50% to 75% – all messages with a spam probability higher than this being placed in the quarantine, with the balance being tagged and passed to users for filtering. The flexibility of PureMessage's policy options has also enabled the University of Ulster to implement its long term message-handling policies in a staged manner, allowing each of the users of the university's 35,000 mailboxes to gain confidence in the product's capabilities. Users are currently sent a quarantine digest three times a week, but PureMessage's optional end-user interface will give them on-demand access to personal quarantines, whitelists and filtering preferences.

Carolan claims that "Apart from a few early anomalies, there have been virtually no false positives, and user acceptance has been remarkable. No-one has asked for mail to bypass the filtering process. PureMessage has performed flawlessly throughout and we've experienced no unexpected downtime."



Deployed as a fully mission-critical application within the university's core IT infrastructure, PureMessage is installed on a corporate dual-CPU Solaris storage area network server. This integrated configuration delivers the ability to switch filtering and quarantining to higher specification servers in real time, depending upon mail traffic loading and processing demand.

Business results

ISD has an ongoing programme to ensure information is provided quickly in the event of a virus outbreak, and to educate its 30,000 email users in best practice to reduce the problems of spam and viruses. However, Carolan says, "PureMessage proved its worth during the outbreaks of the Bagle and Netsky viruses in early 2004, when it was stopping up to 42,000 viruses a day. Together with the reduced helpdesk involvement in directly handling spam, we estimate that the university is saving more than £240,000 a year in support costs."

Andrew Gregg, Assistant Director of Corporate Information and Infrastructure Services, comments that "PureMessage's wide-ranging features, resilient design and highly modular functionality made it the perfect choice for the university – we had no hesitation in adopting it as our corporate anti-spam and anti-virus solution." He continues, "The modular design of PureMessage ensured seamless integration into the university's existing email switching architecture, without the need for any redesign of our established, highly customised mailswitches."

In conclusion, Gregg says, "The Information Services Department of the University of Ulster can highly recommend Sophos PureMessage to any organisation that is concerned with the productivity and resource wastage inherent in openly trusting and handling email environments."

To find out how Sophos products can help protect your organisation, visit www.sophos.com/products