

Cox Communications stops more than 90,000 messages per hour with Secure Computing's Connection Control

COX COMMUNICATIONS AT-A-GLANCE

Industry: Multi-serviced broadband communications

Location: Atlanta, GA

Business need: Circumvent need for additional Exchange servers or IronMail appliances because of exponential increase in spam volume. Maintain zero false positives and sustain IronMail's high effectiveness in blocking spam.

Solution: Secure Computing's Connection Control, a component of the IronMail messaging appliance.

Results:

- ◆ Generated zero false-positives
- ◆ Rejected 90,000 connection from obvious spam-sending sources each hour
- ◆ Reduced total e-mail volume by 40 percent
- ◆ Eliminated the need for additional Exchange servers or IronMail appliances
- ◆ Provided "payback" to spammers by slowing their bandwidth capabilities

"Since upgrading our boxes to Connection Control the return on investment that we have experienced is significant. We have been able to process more mail with no incremental cost."

FRANKLIN WARLICK,
MESSAGING SYSTEMS
ADMINISTRATOR
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Latest component of IronMail allows communications provider to stop unwanted spam, increase scalability and give spammers some "payback"

Cox Communications is the third largest cable provider in the United States. The Company offers an array of services ranging from cable television, local and long distance telephone services, high-speed Internet, and commercial voice and data services. With more than 6.6 million total customers and 30,000 employees, Cox Communications is commonly noted for its high capacity, reliable broadband delivery network, as well as the company's ability to provide best quality customer service. In addition, local cable advertising, promotional opportunities and production services are sold under the Cox Media Brand. Cox is also an investor in programming networks including Discovery Channel.

Business challenge

Cox Communications has more than 50,000 corporate e-mail addresses under its internal cox.com domain, and e-mail is a business-critical communication tool. Employees use e-mail to communicate with not only one another, but also with customers about services, upgrades and even billing information.

"As a multi-serviced communications company, which includes providing broadband Internet service, there are many instances in which people will confuse cox.com, our internal domain name, with cox.net, our ISP domain name," said Franklin Warlick, messaging systems administrator for Cox Communications. "Because of this common mistake, we receive a large amount of e-mail, both legitimate and unwanted. It is critical for us to stop the spam messages from reaching our users, as some may contain system damaging viruses and all unwanted messages cost the company both time and resources."

In early 2004, Cox Communications decided to deploy Secure Computing's IronMail appliance because it evaluates spam messages as a global threat. Additionally, with the increasing sophistication of spam, unsolicited messages can contain viruses and worms, as well as harmful phishing attacks. Since deploying IronMail, Cox Communications found that less than four percent of their e-mail traffic was legitimate. But as spammers began to steadily increase the volume of messages they sent, Cox Communications was faced with the dismal prospect of not only increasing the number of IronMail appliances, but also the need to add more Exchange servers in order to keep up with the continually increasing mail flow.

"In 2001 we were 40,000 mail messages per month. In October 2004 that monthly number had risen to 40 million messages," continued Warlick of Cox Communications. "Although IronMail was currently blocking 30 million of those messages as spam and doing a great job protecting us at the edge without letting the bad stuff into the network, we were in desperate need of a solution to the mail volume issue. Whether it required more IronMail appliances or Exchange servers, Cox was faced with a complicated and costly upgrade to our mail architecture – and it was all because of spam."

Why Cox Communications selected Secure Computing...again

When Cox Communications initially evaluated IronMail in early 2004, they were impressed with IronMail's aggressive approach to spam blocking, driven by IronMail's Spam Profiler which analyzes over 1,000 user definable characteristics of a message, weighs each of those characteristics and makes a decision on whether the message is spam or not. Just 10 months after deploying IronMail, Cox Communications' mail volume had become practically unmanageable, and the increasing spam volumes were solely responsible. Rather than deploy additional IronMail appliances to handle the load, Secure Computing® went to Cox with a solution – a solution that would cost Cox nothing: Connection Control.

Connection Control is the industry's first offering to combine two innovative techniques: traffic shaping and reputation services. This combination dramatically increases the message handling capability of IronMail and reduces the cost for organizations to stop spam. Connection Control uses scores from IronMail's unique Message Profiler technology to create a local reputation database of senders to identify obvious spammers, and then dynamically limits or rejects connections from offending senders.

Results

After activating Connection Control, Cox Communications found that it was able to block nearly 4,000 individual Internet Protocol addresses the first night, and eliminate 90,000 unwanted messages immediately. IronMail's Connection Control enabled Cox Communications to laser in on the worst offenders and reject their spamming attempts at the edge. Furthermore, Cox's total volume dropped by approximately 40 percent.

"Without having deployed Connection Control to stop the most egregious spammers from even sending messages into the IronMail appliance, we would have ended up having to double the amount of IronMails we currently have," said Warlick. "Since upgrading our boxes to Connection Control the return on investment that we have experienced is significant. We have been able to process more mail with no incremental cost. In fact, we can even take one or two of our boxes offline to do maintenance without bringing traffic to a halt."

In addition, maintaining zero false positives is a very important factor for Cox Communications, and since upgrading with Connection Control, the company has continued to generate none. "As our mail rate has grown, we have been able to keep a lot of people out. It is also nice that Connection Control replies to spammers on an SMTP level, which requires some bandwidth on their end, dishing out a little bit of payback."