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Richard Sears, Chief Technical Officer, American Internet Services

American Internet Services Protects Customers from Spam and Speeds Email Delivery with F5 Solution

American Internet Services (AIS) is the fastest growing provider of data center and colocation services in Southern California, serving businesses of all sizes from startups to Fortune 10 corporations. The company manages more than 14,000 unique email boxes for these customers, as well as for its own corporate staff.

Slow email delivery and a high volume of spam messages had resulted in an increasing number of customer complaints. By implementing F5® Message Security Module™ (MSM) on the BIG-IP® Local Traffic Manager™ (LTM) it uses to manage traffic, American Internet Services (www.americanis.net) immediately dropped the amount of spam reaching its servers by 60 percent. The company gained greater control over the processing and delivery of its email and dramatically reduced email delivery times and spam volumes for its customers.

Business Challenges

As a provider of high-end, business-to-business Internet services, AIS is responsible for preventing spam and viruses from reaching its customers. But the need to process email in a way that protects customers must be balanced with the need to deliver email messages quickly and more efficiently.

AIS had anti-spam and antivirus software in place on each of its 11 mail servers, but these solutions were very taxing to the servers' processors. In addition, they still allowed a significant amount of spam to

filter through. The company was getting customer complaints about both the high volume of spam customers were receiving and the slow delivery time for email. At peak usage times, the mail queues could take more than an hour to deliver a message.

The company considered various options and quickly realized that adding more mail servers was unlikely to resolve the problem. Finding a solution to offload services from the servers became the first priority. In addition, AIS wanted to have customizable

Overview

Industry

Data center and Internet services

Challenges

- Speed up customers' email delivery time
- Reduce the volume of spam received by customers
- Maintain control of anti-spam thresholds

Solution

- BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager with Message Security Module

Benefits

- Dramatically reduced spam volume received by customers
- Faster email delivery
- Significantly less drain on servers and resources due to spam
- Flexibility and control over email delivery

controls over which mail it blocked and how the mail is processed.

Solution

AIS brainstormed among its engineering team and decided to implement Message Security Module (MSM) from F5. Prior to implementing MSM, AIS had been using F5 products for several years. The company enjoyed the benefits of new and improved capabilities as F5 products evolved over time. A quick and straightforward MSM installation followed by some adjustments to the spam thresholds took less than a day with no downtime to customers.

MSM leverages reputation data from Secure Computing's TrustedSource™ multi-identity reputation engine to manage and distribute incoming SMTP connections. The TrustedSource IP reputation score database is updated in real time to deliver very high accuracy and virtually no false positives. Email from senders with the worst reputation scores is simply blocked at the connection, before it can pass the firewall.

AIS then uses the flexibility of MSM and BIG-IP LTM to direct email from senders in the rest of the range—from questionable to most trusted—for processing according to the score thresholds AIS has set. Email from trusted sources is delivered to customers very quickly with minimal processing, while questionable email gets a more thorough examination. Antivirus and anti-spam software applications are used to block messages, deliver them, or mark them with a warning to customers about potential spam.

Benefits

After implementing MSM, AIS documented an immediate 60 percent drop in incoming spam messages—approximately 20 million fewer emails per month. The solution has

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had a tremendous impact on the company's ability to protect its customers from unwanted email, deliver its customers' email quickly, and efficiently manage its mail system.

Less spam, happier customers

With a two-thirds reduction in unwanted email hitting its servers, approximately 20 million emails per month, the company has seen a dramatic drop in customer complaints regarding the amount of spam reaching its inboxes.

“We were literally receiving calls in appreciation. Customers immediately noticed the difference,” says Richard Sears, Chief Technical Officer at AIS.

The drop in unwanted email has freed up AIS's resources since employees no longer have to deal with spam-related complaints. “Across the board, MSM has greatly reduced the amount of time that engineers, customer support technicians, and sales have to deal with all of the issues that result from spam,” Sears says.

Faster email delivery

Customers have also noticed a change in how quickly they receive mail. Not only is there far less spam to tax the mail servers and slow them down, but MSM and BIG-IP LTM enable engineers to fast-track well-trusted, priority email, reducing email delivery time from 60 minutes to less than 30 seconds.

“We can put our trust in this solution so that if a particular mail server is at a certain score, we can allow email coming from that server through without additional spam and virus checks, so it gets to our customers that much quicker,” Sears explains.

Management flexibility and efficiency

Beyond the fact that MSM simply blocks email from the worst spam offenders and helps speed up priority email, AIS also counts on the flexibility it provides to use TrustedSource reputation scores to direct mail in specific ways. “We can tier levels and choose how high or low we want those thresholds to be,” Sears says. Staying in control of how its customers receive email, especially when it comes to questionable sources, is important to AIS's ability to meet its customers' needs.

In addition, MSM has given AIS a more centralized and efficient means of overseeing the management and delivery of email. “MSM has definitely reduced our man hours for maintaining the whole mail system,” Sears says. “It's a quick, one-time solution where we can just set it, let it do its thing, and not have to administer it repeatedly every day.”

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