

Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School

Winning the War Against Viruses and Spam

“THE MIRAPPOINT APPLIANCE HAS BEEN RELIABLE WITH ZERO DOWNTIME SINCE DEPLOYMENT AND REQUIRED MINIMAL CHANGE TO THE NETWORK.”

Rick Edmondson, Director of Campus Technology, Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School

CASE STUDY | EDUCATION



Rabun Gap

BUSINESS NEED

Reliable, cost-effective solution to combat spam and viruses

SOLUTION

Mirapoint RazorGate email security appliance

BOTTOM LINE

RazorGate gives IT staff relief from dealing with spam and viruses

Background

Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School, located in Rabun Gap, Georgia, is an independent, coeducational institution providing a traditional college preparatory curriculum for over 300 boarding and day students in grades 6 through 12. Its scenic, century-old 200-acre campus is situated equidistant from Atlanta, Georgia, Greenville, South Carolina, and Asheville, North Carolina. Including 60 faculty and 50 staff, the school's email system supports approximately 425 mail boxes. Email has become the predominant form of communication and a critical link between students, teachers, and parents.

The Business Need

Electronic mail is nothing new at Rabun Gap. “We had email before spam,” proclaims Rick Edmondson, Director of Campus Technology. The school has evolved through several generations of Microsoft Exchange systems, currently relying on a single Microsoft Exchange 2003 server. But in 2004, spam and viruses were beginning to take their toll on system performance with software-based spam and virus filtering the only line of defense. “On some days our 425 users were receiving a million emails,” recalls Edmondson. “And 90 percent of them were classified as not valid mail—essentially junk or spam.”

Not only was the volume of emails increasing, but so was the size. “An HTML-enabled webmail could be relatively large,” suggests Edmondson. “Spammers are sending embedded music, whatever it takes to get your attention. We've seen the size of an individual email grow. All this junk mail was chewing up valuable bandwidth on our TI Internet access circuit and filling up our hard drives.”

As the anti-spam and virus software and single server strained to process incoming mail and message delivery slowed, a single event took place that spurred Edmondson's IT group to action. “We had a student spoofing email as a senior prank, which was offensive to the user whose email address was spoofed,” says Edmondson. “The administration wanted to look at what we could do to stop this.”

With a finite budget and limited staff, Edmondson knew the solution would have to be economical, highly effective in filtering spam and viruses, simple to use and maintain, and reliable.

Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School

The Mirapoint Solution

Whatever solution was chosen, it would require a front-end device to filter spam and viruses before reaching the mail server and to close security loopholes that allowed spoofing. "To protect our system, we needed multiple defenses," says Edmondson.

Edmondson surveyed the market, querying list serves, other school email system administrators, and vendor Web sites. His research led to three suppliers: Barracuda Networks, IronPort Systems, and Mirapoint. Edmondson ruled out Barracuda early on because it lacked the robustness he needed. A couple of individuals he queried with hands-on experience also described it as difficult to manage.

Several sources had suggested that Edmondson evaluate IronPort, which they described as more robust than Barracuda. "IronPort was pushing my budget," says Edmondson.

Then he took a close look at the Mirapoint RazorGate mail security appliance solution and liked what he saw. RazorGate MailHurdle Edition is placed at the edge of the network, in front of any mail server, off-loading a majority of spam traffic before it enters an organization's network. Because many viruses are propagated via email using SMTP programs, they too are blocked at the SMTP layer. This approach of threat blocking dramatically reduces the bandwidth, storage, and IT administrator resources traditionally wasted on processing spam and virus threats. Overall catch rates of 98 percent are achieved with Mirapoint's multi-layered approach.

Key features of RazorGate that stood out for Edmondson were the self-contained appliance approach, the hardened operating system, and the fact that it integrated seamlessly with Microsoft Exchange. RazorGate also offered a better return on investment than IronPort. But the final choice was not based on dollars and cents. "One of the deciding factors between IronPort and Mirapoint was the good feeling we got working with Mirapoint," says Edmondson. "We felt that a relationship with Mirapoint was going to better serve us."

The RazorGate appliance was deployed during summer break 2005. "We had a smooth transition," recalls Edmondson. "Installation took about half a day and was relatively simple, requiring minimal change to the network. To the users it was virtually transparent. Mirapoint sent an engineer to assist us. He was quite knowledgeable and understood the challenges of working in a school environment."

The Bottom Line

RazorGate has been easy to maintain and manage, allowing Edmondson's three-person IT staff to focus on other issues. The solution has also been reliable with zero downtime since deployment.

Email volume reaching the mail server has been reduced, which has translated into better response time and faster mail delivery. Fewer messages have to be stored, freeing up limited storage space. Reduction in messages processed and stored will effectively extend the life of the current mail system. One feature has been very helpful in reducing spam. Recipient Checking queries the school's Active Directory file and automatically discards emails sent to non-existent users.

Viruses carried by spam have also declined, reducing the number of user PCs that must be disinfected by Edmondson's IT team. "I've been pleasantly surprised with the entire process," says Edmondson. "Quite frankly, I've almost forgotten that the Mirapoint solution is there. That's one of those nice surprises."

About Mirapoint

Mirapoint® is the market leader in appliance-based solutions for secure message networks in enterprise, service provider, and education organizations, with more than 100 million mailboxes served and secured worldwide. Customers use Mirapoint appliances including the Message Server mail appliance and RazorGate mail security appliance to build the messaging infrastructure that intelligently serves, secures and manages email. Mirapoint is headquartered in Sunnyvale, California, with offices throughout North America, Europe and Asia. For more information on Mirapoint, visit its Website at www.mirapoint.com.

Configuration

- Mirapoint RazorGate 100 Email Security Appliance