Manage Bandwidth and Take Back Control with the ContentProtect Security Appliance

With roughly 1000 computers spread over three separate locations, and more than 8000 students who need to use those computers, being able to manage the limited bandwidth and being able to exercise control over the network is a big task. This was the challenge facing Denise Cason and the IT department at North Central Texas College, the oldest continuously operating public two-year college in Texas.

"There were some instances where the network would slow down to a halt", said Cason, Chief Information Officer for North Central Texas. "We knew someone was downloading something, and administration would ask who was doing it and what was going on, and we didn't know."

Problems like this are what spurred Cason and her staff to start looking for solutions to help monitor and control their bandwidth. While ContentProtect was not the first solution they looked at, once they saw it in action their decision was made.

"We did look at another solution at the time we were looking at purchasing this one. We knew what we needed, but being on a limited budget we didn't know what it would actually cost," said Cason. "We attended a demo and were pretty much sold immediately. What we found in looking at the other solutions is that they don't seem to have the feature set, the intuitive interface, or the dynamic internet filtering the CP Security Appliance has."

Once Cason and her staff had made the decision to purchase the ContentProtect Security Appliance, it was time to put it to good use. Their main problem was being able to control their bandwidth. Before they purchased the appliance, their network would drop off, and they wouldn't know who the culprit was or what location the problem was coming from.

“With 1000 computers spread over three separate locations and more than 8000 students, it’s not an easy task to find one bandwidth hog,” said Cason. “You suspect it’s in a student lab, and that narrows it down a little bit, but sometimes staff members are the culprits,” said Cason. “They’re not trying to take the network down; they just don’t realize they can’t download that large of a file in the middle of the day during peak usage times.”

Once they integrated the appliance, it made finding out where the problem areas were a lot easier.

“We now have a tool to be able to see exactly where the bandwidth is being used up, and what individual user or what workstation is at the root of the issue,” said Glen Hearell, Network Analyst for North Central Texas. “Now we can move those users over into a group and restrict that bandwidth usage down to where they’re not totally stopped from using the network, but they’re restricted from eating up the whole pipe.” With more than 8000 students and only 1000 computers, there was a great need for students to be able to connect to the network with their own laptops, but because of the bandwidth problems they were experiencing, this was almost impossible.

“With the number of students we have, and because of space limitations, we don’t have the number of labs that we would like,” said Cason. “We needed to bring up wireless, but with the bandwidth problems, that was out of the question until we got a box like this installed.” Along with using the appliance as a bandwidth control method, Cason and the IT department found other uses for the box that allowed them to take control of their network, including content filtering and proxy server blocking. One of their main concerns, since they are an educational institution, is being able to block harmful content but also being able to allow enough content to come through so that they don’t hinder the learning process.

“Of course we wanted to block some content, but being an educational institution there is a fine line between providing accessibility for instruction and blocking content you don’t want on your network,” said Cason. “We aren’t like the high schools where they filter everything, but at the same time we want to make the best use of our limited resources. Teachers are not going to be able to do their instruction if they don’t have enough resources, and we’ve got to allow them the freedom to be able to go to the sites they need too. So it’s kind of that balance.”

"I really like the fact that we're not doing our filtering based on ports anymore," said Hearell. "With the proxy, there are some individuals that have the knowledge to be able to jump that and use a different proxy to view things we'd rather not have on our network. We really liked the fact that we were now able to stop that kind of activity."

The built-in anti-virus and spyware functions of the appliance were something that at first wasn't a top priority, but have become something very useful as well. "It was kind of like icing on the cake for us," said Cason.

Hearell said that implementing the appliance was also a painless process. "It went in very smooth. It was very easy to set up and get the rules set in place, and we really liked the administration of it," said Hearell.

Since implementing the appliance the IT department at North Central Texas have been able to take back control of their network and provide the kind of environment that in conducive to learning.
"We felt like we got a lot of control back. We're not power freaks at all, and because we work for a college we want to be open and allow them to do what they need to do," said Cason. "On the other hand we sometimes felt like we were powerless to make the best use of our resources, so it gave us some power back, and that's good for everybody."

About ContentWatch

Based in Salt Lake City, ContentWatch delivers family-safe computing solutions for the home, library, education, government, and small/medium business markets. ContentWatch's mission is to be the world leader in thought and technology by creating Internet management tools and services that provide homes and businesses with a safer, more productive Internet experience through its patent-pending contextual analysis engine. ContentWatch Internet Management solutions are used in over 155 different countries. For more information on ContentWatch products, visit www.contentwatch.com.

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