

Case Study: Grand Valley State University



Grand Valley State University Solves its Spam and Virus Problems by Switching to Proofpoint

previous anti-spam solution flunked out

Grand Valley State University is based in Allendale, Mich., about 15 miles west of Grand Rapids. The university is part of the Michigan state university system and has more than 23,000 students and 4,000 faculty members. It has been named one of “America’s 100 Best College Buys” by Institutional Research and Evaluation, Inc. for 10 years straight.

As with most universities, Grand Valley State is under constant assault from spam and viruses that, left unchecked, clog both student and faculty inboxes. The university had originally deployed another vendor’s messaging security appliance to rid its network of the thousands of spam messages that it received each day, but found the appliance could not keep up with the constantly changing nature of spam. As a result, it generated an unacceptably high level of false positives (legitimate email messages erroneously classified as spam) and let an unacceptable number of spam messages through to end users.

In addition, Grand Valley State kept all spam messages in a quarantine so that users could review the messages and release legitimate ones. However, the university’s original anti-spam appliance could only keep 400,000 emails in the quarantine at any one time, which meant that the university could only keep messages quarantined for a few days, greatly increasing the chances that a legitimate email trapped in the quarantine would go unnoticed.

“All in all, we had a very bad experience with that vendor,” said Tom Norman, email administrator for Grand Valley State University. “The product didn’t live up to what it promised and the customer support was lagging. We needed to find a new product that would excel at correctly identifying spam and viruses and reduce the amount of time IT staff spent on email administration. We were also looking for a vendor to provide a superior level of customer service and support.”

Proofpoint gets top grades for accuracy, ease-of-use

Grand Valley State started to look for a new solution to rid its network of spam and viruses and looked at about half a dozen vendors in the messaging security space. After evaluating each product on its features and customer support, Grand Valley State selected the Proofpoint Messaging Security Gateway after seeing a demonstration.

The Proofpoint Messaging Security Gateway is the industry’s most effective and accurate solution for enterprise messaging security. The appliance stops all spam and viruses

Business challenge

Grand Valley State University had a big problem with spam and viruses on its hands. The school had deployed an anti-spam appliance to deal with the problem, but experienced issues with the performance, administrative burden and accuracy of the product. The system frequently misclassified legitimate messages as spam and vice versa. The anti-spam appliance also couldn’t keep up with the university’s growing volume of inbound email. The university needed a new solution that would work more accurately and require much less time to maintain.

Proofpoint solution

Grand Valley State deployed the Proofpoint Messaging Security Gateway appliance as a replacement for its previous solution. The university now uses the Proofpoint Spam Detection and Virus Protection modules to protect more than 20,000 student and faculty inboxes.

Results achieved

The Proofpoint appliance was easy to deploy, simple to configure and went to work right away. The Proofpoint solution doesn’t suffer from any of the restrictions that the school’s previous anti-spam appliance suffered from. Proofpoint’s effectiveness proved to be much higher and the system’s near-perfect accuracy eliminated the school’s problems with misclassified email. Administration overhead dropped dramatically with IT staff going from spending several hours per day ensuring email was running properly to near-zero administration time with Proofpoint. Students, faculty and staff have more control over their personal email preferences and their inboxes are free of spam and viruses.

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at the network gateway, preventing them from ever reaching users' inboxes. Norman said that Proofpoint stood out because of its accuracy at classifying spam and viruses and the user features that proved far superior to those of any other solution.

"Even during the first demonstration of the Proofpoint appliance, it quickly became clear that Proofpoint was a world-class, enterprise solution to the problems we were experiencing," said Norman. "We really liked that Proofpoint gives our users control of how they receive their email. Our users can control the level of spam detection or even opt out of detection entirely. On the administrative side, Proofpoint provides a plethora of real-time reporting features and an intuitive interface that was far superior to the features in the product we previously used."

Proofpoint Products Deployed
Proofpoint Messaging Security Gateway
Proofpoint Spam Detection
Proofpoint Virus Protection (F-Secure version)

In addition, the Proofpoint appliance offers much higher performance than the university's previous solution. Norman says that the university's inbound email volume is growing extremely rapidly and recently experienced record daily email volumes of

over 900,000 inbound messages. But the Proofpoint appliance has easily kept up with the load and doesn't have any of the quarantine limits or performance issues plagued Grand Valley's original anti-spam solution.

Proofpoint also helped Grand Valley simplify its gateway security architecture by providing gateway anti-spam and anti-virus on a single platform—replacing the university's previously separate anti-spam and anti-virus systems with one easy-to-manage solution.

Proofpoint customer service earns extra credit

Norman noted that Proofpoint's sales and customer support teams have been extremely responsive to the university's needs, checking in with him every so often to make sure the deployment is running smoothly. Norman also said that the Proofpoint deployment has been received very well so far.

"The product's effectiveness has been so good that we've gotten overwhelmingly positive feedback from our email users," said Norman. "We've also noticed that we're saving a ton of administration time. I used to spend more than two hours each day dealing with our old anti-spam product. With Proofpoint, I don't even spend two minutes in administration. It just works."

Although Grand Valley State is not currently using Proofpoint's outbound modules, which scan email leaving the university for anything that violates internal email policies and give users the options of encrypting or quarantining email that is caught, Norman expects that the university may deploy outbound modules in the future.

"We value our academic freedoms here, so are very careful to respect our students' and faculty members' rights to free communication. However, we do have sensitive information, such as social security numbers and other personal identifying information that shouldn't be emailed outside of our network. Implementing technology, such as Proofpoint's, is the best way to prevent this data from being emailed out without infringing on anyone's rights," said Norman.

All in all, Norman said that Grand Valley State's use of Proofpoint has far exceeded anyone's expectations. "Proofpoint's product is just miles ahead of our previous anti-spam product. Proofpoint has just been a godsend to me because I'm now viewed as the 'good guy' for finally fixing our problem with spam and viruses." ➡

About Grand Valley State University

Grand Valley State University, established in 1960, is a four-year public university. It attracts more than 22,000 students with its high quality programs and state-of-the-art facilities. Grand Valley provides a fully accredited liberal arts undergraduate and graduate education and has campuses in Allendale, Grand Rapids, and Holland and centers in Muskegon and Traverse City. Grand Valley is the comprehensive regional university for the state's second largest metropolitan area and offers 69 undergraduate and 25 graduate degree programs. The university is dedicated to individual student achievement, going beyond the traditional classroom experience, with research opportunities and business partnerships. Grand Valley employs more than 1,700 people and is committed to providing a fair and equitable environment for the continued success of all.

About Proofpoint, Inc.

Proofpoint provides messaging security solutions for large enterprises to stop spam, protect against email viruses, ensure compliance with corporate policies and regulations and defend against leaks of confidential and proprietary information via email and other network protocols. The company's flagship products, the Proofpoint Messaging Security Gateway™ and Proofpoint Protection Server® provide future-proof messaging security using Proofpoint MLX™ technology, an advanced machine learning system developed by Proofpoint scientists and engineers.

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