

Case Study: Placer County Office of Education



Placer County Office of Education Aces Messaging Security with Proofpoint

old anti-spam solution earns failing grade

The Placer County Office of Education (PCOE) is located in the fastest growing county in California, serving more than 62,000 students and 14,000 employees in 17 school districts. PCOE provides vital service to school districts in fiscal oversight and financial advice, technical assistance, curriculum and instruction support, staff development and legal assistance. PCOE also provides email and Internet services to eight school districts in the county.

PCOE realized it needed to replace its anti-spam solution when an overwhelming amount of spam and viruses inundated its network. The county worked with Proofpoint channel partner 8e6 Technologies (which had previously helped the county with the selection of a content filtering appliance) to identify Proofpoint as the ideal solution to its messaging security needs. PCOE considered messaging security solutions from other major vendors, but Proofpoint was unique in that it provided a more comprehensive product capable of securing both inbound and outbound email streams.

“The other vendors did not offer a product that would work well in the education sector. They had basic anti-spam and anti-virus solutions, but with Proofpoint we are able to pick and choose from an extensive range of additional security features for further protection of our network. This is important to us because it allows us to choose services that are specific to our education needs and vulnerabilities,” said Peter Skibitzki, network specialist for The Placer County Office of Education.

selecting the right answer in multiple choice packages

The Placer County Office of Education deployed the Proofpoint Messaging Security Gateway to define and enforce different email policies for each of the direct service districts under Placer County’s jurisdiction. Proofpoint’s Spam Detection module provides a state-of-the-art line of defense that catches and quarantines messages before they reach the network. It uses Proofpoint MLX machine learning technology to analyze more than 200,000 structural and content attributes in every email to classify messages with the industry’s highest accuracy rate. Skibitzki said that PCOE receives about 15,000 pieces of mail daily, about 10,000 of which are spam.

“Proofpoint is so much better at detecting spam and viruses than our previous solution and we no longer have problems with legitimate email being classified as spam. The contrast in results was like night and day and completely justified our purchase of

Business challenge

The Placer County Office of Education (PCOE) learned an important lesson in messaging security when its previous anti-spam appliance stopped working effectively. The appliance made it difficult for PCOE’s IT department to respond to problems quickly and efficiently because of the amount of spam getting through the filter. The system would also lock up, which caused eight of the county’s school districts to lose email and Internet connectivity. In addition, the vendor was continually charging for hidden costs of upgrades without notice.

Proofpoint solution

The Placer County Office of Education selected the Proofpoint Messaging Security Gateway appliance to protect 650 users across eight school districts. PCOE uses a combination of inbound and outbound security modules including Proofpoint Spam Detection, Virus Protection, Zero-Hour Anti-Virus, Regulatory Compliance and Secure Messaging to ensure the security of both inbound and outbound email.

Results achieved

Proofpoint’s inbound modules immediately reduced the amount of spam and viruses infiltrating PCOE’s network, while its outbound modules ensured that private information does not leave PCOE’s network inappropriately. PCOE found that Proofpoint’s appliance was not only highly effective but also extremely user-friendly, easy to deploy and simple to maintain.

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Proofpoint,” said Skibitzki. “Our users were amazed at the amount of junk mail eliminated from their inboxes.”

PCOE also uses Proofpoint’s Virus Protection module, which continuously and automatically scans messages and attachments for malicious code. For added security, PCOE has also deployed the Proofpoint Zero-Hour Anti-Virus Module, which identifies new viruses and malicious code within minutes of their mass distribution on the Internet. This prevents virus infection at the earliest stages of new outbreaks.

“It was very important for us to have a single, comprehensive system that doesn’t require endless maintenance,” said Skibitzki. “We enjoy the added security of knowing that Proofpoint is dealing with the spam and viruses before they even get onto the network.”

PCOE earns extra credit for outbound security

The Placer County Office of Education is extremely concerned about the security of student information, so it deployed Proofpoint’s Regulatory Compliance and Secure Messaging modules. These modules scan PCOE’s outbound email and automatically encrypt any messages that contain sensitive data in order to prevent improper exposure of private information.

Proofpoint’s Regulatory Compliance module monitors outbound email messages and scans for private information including Social Security numbers, financial transactions and sensitive student information, such as student ID numbers and health information. Students in California are assigned California School Information Services (CSIS) State-wide Student Identifiers, which are ID numbers that follow students during their academic lives. These ID numbers must be kept confidential because they are associated with so much information about students. Also, because PCOE has student health information on its network, it must comply with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which ensures the confidentiality of private healthcare information.

“Proofpoint helps us ensure that confidential student and employee information stays private without a lot of complicated or time-consuming administration. The Proofpoint appliance accurately identifies private identity, healthcare and financial information and allows us to automatically safeguard this data,” said Skibitzki. “Based on our own policies, these messages can be blocked or encrypted before leaving our network.”

PCOE puts Proofpoint on the honor roll

The Placer County Office of Education has been satisfied with Proofpoint’s performance that it also plans to deploy the Proofpoint Digital Asset Security module. With this module, PCOE will be able to ensure the security of any type of document deemed confidential. The module uses Proofpoint MLX technology to analyze confidential information and keep it from leaving the County Office’s network via email.

“Not only does Proofpoint provide excellent protection, but also the entire process of deploying the appliance and configuring our policies was painless,” said Skibitzki. “All of our questions and concerns, from sales to support, have consistently been a top priority to Proofpoint.”

Skibitzki concluded, “We are a small county, but Proofpoint gives us the ability to be on the cutting edge of technology. Other much larger districts are now looking to us as the model for how messaging security should be done.” ➔

About Placer County Office of Education

The Placer County Office of Education (PCOE) serves as a vital resource to school districts by providing fiscal oversight and financial advice, technical assistance, curriculum and instruction support, staff development and legal assistance. In addition, the office plays a leadership role in delivering quality education to more than 62,000 students in Placer County, Calif. PCOE di-

Proofpoint Products Deployed
Proofpoint Messaging
Security Gateway
Proofpoint Spam Detection
Proofpoint Virus Protection
Proofpoint Zero-Hour Anti-Virus
Proofpoint Regulatory Compliance
Proofpoint Secure Messaging

rectly educates more than 3,000 children and adults in regional occupation, special education, independent home study and alternative education programs. Approximately 600 full and part time certified and classified staff work year-round in providing services to the county’s districts and programs. An elected County Superintendent of Schools helps ensure that all 17 county school districts and the 107 schools continue to operate in an efficient, service oriented manner.

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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