

Straight Talking – The web at work

By Bob Tarzey, Service Director, Quocirca Ltd

The online world does not look like it will be getting any safer in 2007. The number of web-based threats continues to grow: spyware, phishing sites, viruses and so on. Meanwhile the volume of spam continues to increase - not just the number of messages but also their size as picture, video and sound files are increasingly attached to spam to entice users to activate malware.

Many IT departments have a degree of control over spam but have yet to fully address web-based threats. They need to strike a balance between allowing access to the web, which obviously has productivity benefits whilst making sure productivity is not adversely affected by the huge number of distractions out there. Unchecked use of the web also provides an easy route in for the purveyors of web-borne malware.

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It is not just web surfing that is the problem. As with email, the web also provides a way for content to leave an organisation. Workers can use instant messaging and web mail as an alternative to corporate email for sending messages and posting to blogs that are not in line with a company's thinking.

For filtering both email and web content, IT departments are increasingly turning to managed services. There are some obvious advantages to doing this. Managed services keep unwanted content at arm's length, saving the company bandwidth and storage space. And the IT department no longer has to worry about keeping signature files and other filters up to date nor about scalability. These all become the managed service provider's problems.

Consequently 2006 has been a good year for the providers of managed filtering services and in many cases web and email filtering services have come together through partnership or acquisition to provide both from a single source.

For instance, UK-based web filtering vendor ScanSafe has seen 100 per cent growth in seats served by its web filtering service. It is now selling as much in the US as in Europe, has set up in Asia and now has around 40 partnerships with internet service providers. But perhaps its biggest coup has been to reach a partnership agreement with Postini, a leading provider of email filtering services.

Postini has also expanded rapidly in the last few years, not quite at the rate of growth as spam itself but not far off that. It claims the number one position in the market for hosted email filtering. Expanding its business to include web filtering is an obvious choice for Postini as the email filtering nears saturation (although Postini continues to gain customers from churn in the market). Postini has 100s of ISP partners which could provide a lucrative route to market for its new web-filtering offering.

This has not gone unnoticed by other vendors. McAfee, the world's largest pure-play IT security company, has itself formed a partnership with Postini and is reselling its managed filtering services. Microsoft made a couple of acquisitions recently - FrontBridge for email filtering and FutureSoft's Dynacom I-Filter (buying its web filtering product, not the company) - so now has the capability to offer both services.

Two other UK companies, BlackSpider and SurfControl, got together in 2006 to achieve a similar goal. BlackSpider is a competitor to Postini that also provides a managed email filtering service. SurfControl has long been a competitor in the web filtering market. Along with companies such as Secure Computing and WebSense it provides filters for controlling what employees can do on the web. The aim of bringing the two companies together is to leverage one's web filtering heritage with the other's experience of providing a managed service.

Not to be left out, yet another UK company with a global presence, MessageLabs, also launched a hosted web filtering service in July 2006, to sit alongside its well established email filtering

service. MessageLabs has a partnership with IBM, bringing the world's number two IT vendor in to play (yes, if you haven't already heard, HP's latest quarterly figures allowed it to claim top spot).

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email traffic. If you were having problems finding a vendor who did both email and web a year ago, you will have no problem now. And the chances are that some of the technology you end up benefiting from will have had its origins in the UK.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, Dell, T-Mobile, Vodafone, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at <http://www.quocirca.com>