

East Carolina University (ECU)

Marshal Increases Productivity and Security for East Carolina University

Since its founding as a teacher training college, East Carolina University (ECU) has grown to become a vital research university and a leader in human health sciences, serving more than 30,000 students and 10,000 faculty and staff.

Like many organizations, ECU has had to deal with an increasing amount of spam burdening its email system. The high demand on network bandwidth often resulted in user frustration and increased virus threat. The university's desire to increase distance learning opportunities, grow as a medical research institution and maintain its status as a publicly-funded institution demanded that they find a solution to reduce spam by at least 50 percent, as well as reduce administrator time spent handling the deluge of potentially system damaging email. In addition, capacity planning required a solution that would not add servers and would integrate well with their very large Microsoft Exchange deployment. After a thorough investigation, the university chose the award-winning content scanning solution MailMarshal SMTP to detect and isolate unwanted email.

Background

East Carolina University is a large public research university. The administrators were facing increased spam and virus threats that slowed network performance and occupied too much administrator time.

Benefits

MailMarshal is a spam filter with virus protection that detects potential and actual spam email and isolates it in a safe location. MailMarshal SMTP is a fast, easy-to-use external email security solution that works with any SMTP mail system, including Microsoft Exchange, Novell GroupWise, Lotus Domino, Sendmail and Linux mail servers to scrutinize all components of an email message, including text, attachments and embedded content. System users can look at the isolated email and categorize it as wanted or unwanted. This isolate-and-decide design gets large volumes of unwanted mail off the email network, boosting productivity and performance. "The loads on the servers will be significantly reduced by having

MailMarshal solution in place." Carol Davis, systems manager, East Carolina University

A Powerful Total Solution

East Carolina University has more than 30,000 student accounts and approximately 7,000 to 10,000 faculty and staff accounts. When they began noticing a significant increase in the amount of spam, they went in search of an effective spam filter that would enable them to unburden IT staff. "We felt like some of the issues that we are continuously facing in systems administration, with keeping systems and security maintained up to date, were already challenging enough. We wanted to look at a third-party solution to help us with spam prevention and antivirus from the SMTP gateway coming in," said Carol Davis, systems manager for East Carolina University.

"As part of our assessment process and during our research phase, Marshal Ltd kept coming toward the top of the list. Other universities and businesses using the MailMarshal SMTP solution were very impressed and gave a lot of positive feedback.

"With MailMarshal, suspect email messages are deleted, quarantined or simply monitored based on the needs of the customer environment.

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Administrators can generate meaningful reports depicting email usage and security concerns. The customer receives a significant return on investment (ROI) as workplace productivity increases, assets are protected and the potential for liability is diminished.”

Scalability and Resilience

Email is a critical component for the institution: East Carolina University wanted a solution that could scale to the 45,000 existing user accounts and they wanted proof. “We had to have something that was very integrated with Microsoft Exchange. East Carolina University’s volume of email internally is very big, and much content is of a critical nature,” said Davis.

Marshal, unlike the other vendors ECU investigated, was able to provide test data showing the high performance of MailMarshal SMTP in a very large volume Exchange environment. MailMarshal provides a 95 percent spam detection rate with less than 0.1 percent false positives and excellent performance speed. This information was critical because the university was looking for a solution that could handle as many as a million emails per day. “We expect the number of email accounts to increase annually. We have 45,000 accounts today and will have 65,000 in the years to come, with increasing numbers of

students and prospective students. The importance of the email system can’t be underestimated,” said Davis.

Once ECU determined that MailMarshal was capable of handling their large Exchange environment, the system administration team created an internal group for early testing of MailMarshal. Once certain of the feasibility, they followed up with a larger pilot group of 250 users and extensive internal testing.

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“Scalability-wise at ECU, our challenge was to create an architecture of resilience,” said Neil Chapman, technical account manager for NLighten, a Marshal preferred Partner. “Email is a critical component for the university: students to instructors, staff to students, business committees and more. We wanted to create a system that would handle a million messages a day, and also in the architecture be able to pull part of the infrastructure out of service if needed and still handle the load. MailMarshal allowed the flexibility to do that.”

Self-Manageability: Empowerment and Efficiency

During the research process, East Carolina University realized that getting users engaged in the content management was essential. Being a publicly funded university, economic efficiency is a pressing concern.

“At ECU, you have two administrators with 45,000 users and a growth pattern on the way. They were basically managing the core of the system,” said Chapman. “That is all they had time to do—keep the servers up—and all of a sudden someone was telling them they needed to manage the content due to a huge amount of increased traffic that was 70- to 90-percent spam.”

MailMarshal provided a solution that enabled users to review their own quarantined email using an intuitive web-based interface, saving time by not having to contact internal support for assistance, and essentially creating a distributed content management architecture.

Productivity with Security

ECU’s growth as a medical research institution makes their messaging infrastructure more critical. The university runs a research and teaching hospital that is the up and coming star in a bright sky that includes world-renowned university hospitals at Duke


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University and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It is crucial to catch malicious code and viruses before they enter a system containing data representing vital information to all university departments, and especially the healthcare community.

Because MailMarshal resides outside a customer's firewall, only authorized information is allowed to enter or leave the network, while annoying and potentially harmful messages are blocked at the gateway.

“With the Marshal solution sitting outside the perimeter, outside of our firewall, it has enabled us to capture things before they get into our environment and remove those from coming in house at that layer versus the previous configuration which was at the database layer,” said Davis.

Conclusion

Mail queues have already dropped from thousands of messages backed up to virtually none, significantly increasing mail throughput. Projecting from just the pilot program, East Carolina University is confident about the benefits of MailMarshal.

Davis summarized, “The loads on the servers will be significantly reduced when you have a MailMarshal solution in place. We've got around 250 users in our pilot program, and we can see that from a big perspective the amount of unwanted email will significantly decrease for our faculty, our staff and our students. Our services that we provide to the campus have increased because of having this solution in place. My administrators are happy.

Performance and scalability were critical—I didn't want to bring in 15 more servers and still not meet the overall objective. We have already significantly seen, in our pilot program, the reduction of our capacity planning needs and our administration bandwidth usage overall and fewer security incidents. We've already seen an increase as far as speed, and I think that when recommending or looking at solutions, those criteria all have to be addressed, as well as the scalability. Being outside the firewall was important—and MailMarshal SMTP being a gateway-based content and security solution definitely did that for us. It has increased the delivery of external mail significantly. We think we will have fewer security incidents.”



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