



Eliminated Unwanted Emails for 3,000 Corporate Users - Prevented Directory Harvest Attacks

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Chris Burroughs, Director of Desktop and Voice Services

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

- Ability to prevent directory harvest attacks (DHAs)
- Spam and Directory Harvest attacks were prevented
- Individual users can use a convenient Postini web interface to manage their own suspect message quarantine box and tune their own spam filters

THE PROBLEM

Spam Growing Out of Control

Circuit City Stores, Inc., based in Richmond, Virginia, is a leading specialty retailer of consumer electronics, personal computers and entertainment software. To better serve its customers, Circuit City combines product specialists—who complete extensive online and in-store training programs—with a broad range of offerings, including approximately 5,000 top-quality, low-priced consumer electronics products. Circuit City operates more than 600 Superstores and five mall-based stores in the U.S.

Like many major companies, Circuit City was experiencing an ever-increasing amount of spam directed at its corporate email users. Chris Burroughs, Director of Desktop and Voice Services for Circuit City, recalled how her email had increased to more than 250 spam emails a day within the past year. She was spending excessive amounts of time manually examining and deleting spam from her email inbox, and more importantly, found herself accidentally deleting important emails.

“I would get 50 valid emails and 250 spam emails every day,” Burroughs explained. “And I was worried about the same thing happening to other people in our company.” Then the complaints from end users began to increase. She would receive offensive emails from spammers herself, and then receive them again from concerned employees asking her how she was trying to stop them. “I had about the worst spam volume in the company but my boss and the CIO were also experiencing problems,” she said. “We decided we had to solve the spam issue before it got out of control.”

Responsible for Circuit City’s corporate email system, Burroughs first tried an inhouse solution, attempting to manually write agents that would block specific domains but quickly found this approach was a losing battle. Employees would

forward spam to Circuit City’s Human Resources (HR) department, and HR would then send them to Burroughs who would block the offending sites. This manual approach soon became an endless chase.

In evaluating alternative anti-spam solutions, Burroughs began to wonder exactly how big the problem of spam had become for Circuit City. “We knew how much spam my team was getting, but we weren’t sure how much spam the organization was experiencing as a whole,” she noted. To find out, Burroughs decided to give Postini’s anti-spam and anti-virus managed service a try by conducting a 30-day trial of the Postini service.

THE SOLUTION

Postini’s Managed Service Eliminates Spam and Complaints

“At first we were hesitant about pointing our MX records to Postini,” Burroughs explained, “but we thought the 30-day trial would at least show us how big of a problem we had and what our return on investment (ROI) on an anti-spam solution should be.” The trial process was easy to implement, and Burroughs decided to test the Postini service with a few executive users, including the CIO. She also sent an email to the entire company inviting participation and got 250 users to try the service.

The trial was so successful at eliminating spam from employee inboxes that Burroughs was able to roll out the Postini service across the entire company.

THE RESULTS

Spam Stopped and as an Added Bonus Directory Harvest Attacks Were Prevented

Burroughs said that one of the greatest benefits from the Postini service stems from its ability to prevent directory harvest attacks (DHAs). DHAs are designed to net spammers lists of valid email addresses at specific companies to which they can send additional

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spam or sell to other spammers. Spammers and other unscrupulous list brokers harvest addresses by sending thousands (or even hundreds of thousands) of messages to multiple addresses such as johndoe@circuitcity.com, or jdoe@circuitcity.com. Spammers track all of the addresses that do not bounce back or generate errors, and consider these as valid addresses.

DHAs also have a very damaging side effect: consuming enormous amounts of email server resources while email servers try to cope with DHA probes. Lotus Notes and Exchange servers, for example, generally accept all messages for their domain by default, generating untold numbers of non-delivery reports that use up valuable server cycles, and may even bring the servers down.

DHAs were something we really hadn’t planned on,” Burroughs said, “but thanks to Postini we are able to prevent them from overloading our systems.”

Postini’s exclusive preemptive technology at the SMTP connection level prevents directory harvest probes from ever reaching Circuit City servers. “We made Postini our first line of defense to prevent DHA from overloading our servers,” Burroughs emphasized. “Postini handled all that traffic pummeling our servers without any problem, ensuring only legitimate email was delivered.”

Burroughs warned that everyone should be aware of DHAs. “Everyone’s going to get a directory harvest attack at some time,” she said. “Before Postini, we actually observed an attack, watching our Lotus Notes logs as spammers tried every combination of letters until it hit a legitimate address and we were powerless to stop it. During the attack, our email was so slow people thought our servers were down.”

By signing up with Postini’s managed email security service, Circuit City can now prevent DHAs and denial of service attacks on its email system. Postini works so well in preventing DHAs that Circuit City recommended Postini to Carmax, previously one of its subsidiaries, because CarMax was experiencing the same types of attacks.

Burroughs also mentioned that Postini’s end-user management capabilities stand out as a major benefit. The fact that individual users can use a convenient Postini web interface to manage their own suspect message quarantine box, and tune their own spam filters, has avoided the IT administration necessary with other server or appliance products.

“We barely know the Postini service is running,” Burroughs said. “It’s easy. It works. What else could we ask for? Postini was the quickest and least costly route to solve our spam problem and it had the added benefit of stopping the DHA we experienced,” she continued.

“Everyone in the company thinks our IT department is great for eliminating spam even though we really didn’t have to spend much time and effort once we’d found Postini,” she concluded. “All we had to do was point our MX records to Postini’s service and figure out our email policy rules. People throughout the company are now much happier with our email service.”



ABOUT POSTINI

As the leader in Integrated Message Management, Postini managed services protect businesses from a wide range of IM and email threats, provide message archiving and encryption, and enable the management and enforcement of enterprise policies to meet regulatory compliance requirements.

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