

WARWICKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

INDUSTRY:
Public Sector

USERS
13,500

WEBSense INTEGRATION:
Websense Web Security Suite

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Chris Page, Technical Development Manager,
Children's Services, Warwickshire LEA.

Warwickshire County Council safeguards its pupils' online learning environment with Websense

Introduction

The provision of Internet access for primary and secondary schools is essential in providing an interactive learning environment for all ages. That environment must be secure to protect pupils from Internet misuse and security threats, and to guarantee their safety from unwanted online criminal activities such as grooming.

A recent survey highlights some of the key concerns around Web security that Local Education Authorities need to take into account. According to this survey, 71% of teenagers have an online profile, mostly on social networking sites, and 69% of them have received unsolicited communications, while 19% report being bullied or harassed online. *

Using Websense Web Security Suite software as part of an integrated security environment has enabled Warwickshire Local Education Authority (LEA) to deliver a flexible, accredited content filtering solution that balances schools' need to provide an online learning environment for their pupils, with the LEA's need for that environment to be secure.

It also supports the government's Every Child Matters Agenda which recognises the changes required to the whole system of children's services and the need for a shared sense of responsibility across government agencies for safeguarding children and protecting them from harm.

Delivering an intelligent Web filtering solution

Warwickshire County Council's Local Education Authority has a statutory responsibility to cater for the educational needs of the children in 248 schools in the county. This includes 139 primary and 36 secondary schools, located from Nuneaton in the North, to Stratford in the West and Shipston on Stour in the South.

That statutory responsibility also covers the need, at the request of the government in 2006, to provide effective Internet monitoring and filtering to protect networks from security threats and prevent school children coming into contact with online predators.

The management of this secure environment is provided by Warwickshire Local Education Authority's (LEA) ICT Development Service, which oversees the development, delivery and management of information and communications technology for around 80,000 computer users, including pupils, teachers and the local community.

The security solution, of which Websense Web Security Suite is the critical Web site filtering component, is based on a virtualised Microsoft Windows Server 2003 system that also comprises Internet Security and Acceleration (ISA) Server 2006.

The Websense software is virtualised under VMware and sits on top of the ISA Server, blocking access to inappropriate sites. The ease of Websense's integration with Microsoft's Active Directory is an important factor in the Warwickshire implementation because secondary schools in the Warwickshire area also have their own Active Directory.

A third element of the security solution, Policy Central Enterprise, monitors user behaviour and collects screen captures as evidence of inappropriate behaviour, which might, for example, include the use of proxy sites which can facilitate access to blocked sites. In all, more than 11,000 computers across the county are served by the solution.

“There are many security vendors in the market and I need to know that our vendor will still be around in a few years time. This consideration, together with Websense’s BECTA accreditation, its excellent Web filtering and reporting capabilities, and the licensing benefits are the reasons we chose this software”

Chris Page, Technical Development Manager,
Children’s Services, Warwickshire LEA.

An approved and BECTA-accredited solution

Warwickshire LEA required the elements of its security infrastructure to be accredited by the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA).

BECTA’s role is to assist government organisations in using technology to raise educational standards. The BECTA Accreditation of the Internet Services to Education scheme enables educational establishments to make an informed choice when purchasing filtering products and services.

As a result of its accreditation, Websense is certified as a trusted supplier within the education sector and able to deliver its software to schools, colleges and local authorities on this basis.

“Here at Warwickshire LEA we wanted to put robust security in place. BECTA accreditation is an industry-wide quality assurance standard and it made good business sense to us to use this as a critical success factor in the technologies we selected,” explains Chris Page, Technical Development Manager, Children’s Services, Warwickshire LEA.

Services and products can only be purchased from accredited providers who meet and maintain agreed standards in content filtering and service performance. The accreditation process makes a technical and quality assessment of services for factors such as Web content filtering and virus alerting and support procedures.

Providing a balance between security and school usability

The development of social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace and children’s desire to use them has made Internet security management a challenge for local authorities throughout the country.

As part of a robust, centralised solution, Warwickshire LEA’s ICT Development Service uses Websense to monitor and manage access to these Web pages as well as prevent access to blacklisted Web sites which contain inappropriate content or that are proxy sites which technology-savvy pupils try and use as an attempt to navigate around any restrictions.

“The children are so well networked themselves, they learn things from each other about how to try and get around Web access by using proxies. Websense identifies, categorises and filters the thousands of proxy sites and it has automatically given us a whole new level of protection,” says Page.

The ICT Development Service also required flexibility in their choice of Web filtering software. Page explains that centralised management was not sufficient. It was essential that the IT team could delegate administration and responsibility for Web use policies out to each school site, while continuing to ensure secure Internet access centrally.

“This was a very important consideration for our secondary schools, so that Web policies could be tailored to meet the specific educational needs of students at any one time. For example, if a school 6th form is doing a music project, they may want to give pupils access to music sites for the duration of that assignment. Typically, a school might limit access to music sites as they often contain downloads which are susceptible to security threats such as viruses.”

Warwickshire LEA has found the ability to tailor Internet access and provide intelligent and flexible content filtering to support the requirements of learning and teaching to be a key benefit of Websense.

Providing Web filtering as part of an integrated 'early-warning' solution

It is important to Warwickshire LEA to offer an integrated security solution combining Websense content filtering with Microsoft ISA server, which gives Web administrators alerting and monitoring capabilities, and Policy Central Enterprise (PCE), a package that monitors input and output at the computer user level.

Websense sits layered across the network, and easily integrates with both standard and non standard technologies.

Such an integrated approach means Warwickshire can operate an effective tripartite solution able to track an instance of a child who exhibits warning signs of a problem, such as writing an essay about how to deal with being bullied, or monitoring any suspected instances of grooming in Internet chat rooms, where even the punctuation and use of language by an adult posing as a 14 year old can be identified, their login details captured, and the appropriate authorities notified.

These 'early-warning' signals mean appropriate children's pastoral care services can be alerted at an early stage before a real problem develops.

We can see how effective Websense is at providing intelligent Web filtering because PCE, our second line of defence, captures the screen whenever anything gets through," says Page. "When this happens we can adjust the configuration of Websense and ISA to block the current distractions and the school can also use the screen capture evidence to discuss inappropriate behaviour with pupils and their parents."

Improved reporting and effective licensing

Two additional features of Websense software, attractive to Warwickshire County Council's LEA, are its powerful reporting capabilities and licensing model.

The reporting feature logs and reports details of any attempted violation, and offers appropriate functionality for headteachers to use and tailor to their own needs at each school. At the same time, as a local authority, Warwickshire has benefited from Websense's licensing model.

"It is important to us that Websense is based on and fits with industry standard components, and that the licensing regime meets our needs. This is a key criteria and the licensing model is very appropriate," says Page, "because we are not penalised for the number of installations we have. This has allowed us to provide the best "

Page also knows he can have confidence that Websense has longevity in the marketplace.

"I had a bad experience when looking at streaming media products. We went through a pilot phase, and then found that the supplier whose product we were planning to use was withdrawing it from the market. There are many security vendors in the market and I need to know that our vendor will still be around in a few years time. This consideration, together with Websense's BECTA accreditation, its excellent Web filtering and reporting capabilities, and the licensing benefits are the reasons we chose this software."

Page believes the Internet security solution he now has in place, is in Warwickshire pupils' best interests in keeping them safe.

"Children have access to the Web from the age of 4, and they are constantly at risk online: risk from viewing inappropriate material or in these days of online communication and social networks, of coming into contact with people they shouldn't."

"The system we have of which Websense is a key element places no burdens on individual primary or secondary schools. By deploying one system exclusively, we have benefited from the bulk purchasing power of the LEA. There is no question of having to rely on a local technician at a school because these issues are too important to be monitored by someone at an individual school. When you look at the stakes, it's frightening. Potentially a child could be damaged and it's our duty to protect against security threats."

"Part of that is due to delivering a working system that is flexible and supports what schools are trying to do online, including opening doors to their local community, and making it safe," says Page.

* Cox Communications Survey on Teenage Internet Behaviour (www.cox.com)

About Websense

Websense, Inc. (NASDAQ: WBSN), a global leader in integrated Web, messaging and data protection technologies, provides Essential Information Protection™ for more than 42 million employees at more than 50,000 organisations worldwide. Distributed through its global network of channel partners, Websense software and hosted security solutions help organisations block malicious code, prevent the loss of confidential information and enforce Internet use and security policies. For more information, visit www.websense.com

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