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Blocking the Bad, Not the Good, is Good!

By Thomas Carnill, Field Engineer, TechSolutions

When the filtering of web traffic, known as content filtering, first came around the corporate environment, it was usually enough to just block certain domains on a firewall, and then continually maintain that list of blocked domains. This method, while simplistic, was effective at the time, but cannot offer useful features such as deeper scrutiny of data. Modern content filters, like the Barracuda Web Filter offered by TechSolutions, scan more than just a simple domain name by going deeper and only blocking certain portions of a website or blocking harmful advertisements. Blocking entire sites can improve security, however many websites are a hodge-podge of content that is often an aggregate of several other sources. By completely blocking one of these sites, you may inadvertently be blocking useful content. Whereas an effective content filter can drill down beyond the website address and check what's in the data.



Beyond merely filtering for the sake of security, your company could be held liable for any data that is transferred on your internal network. Ideally, you should trust that all of your employees will use their web access for their job functions, but in reality, even a single undisciplined user can create serious legal issues for the company. The downloading of pornography and copyrighted materials at work is a dangerous threat to any company no matter their size. If GOOD content filtering is deployed, you can protect your company from that type of threat. A filtering solution from a known trusted vendor can also protect you legally because it shows your commitment to preventing these issues in your company.

Productivity can also be adversely affected due to internet abuse. It is quite difficult to strike a balance between protecting your company while not overly restricting your employees. In certain situations, unrestricted access can cause more harm than good, but over-restricting access can do the same. The last thing you want to do is to block sites your employees may need to perform job functions. One tactic many companies employ is time based filters that turn on at the beginning of the work day, then off during common lunch break time, back on after lunch, and then off again at end of the day. These filters typically continue to block harmful sites while allowing temporary access to social media sites and media streaming sites.

Active Directory integration is also a key feature to consider when picking out your content filter. For those not familiar with Active Directory, one its primary functions is providing a centralized, manageable database of usernames, groups of users and passwords. Many content filters now support Active Directory integration, which facilitates assigning content filter policies to different categories of employees in your organization. For example, the policy assigned to your IT department could entail only blocking malicious sites, whereas the policy applied to non-IT staff members could be configured to restrict access to social media sites in addition to malicious sites. Active Directory integration even provides

organizations with the ability to implement policies that apply to individual users, as well as groups of users. However, careful thought should be given because animosity can develop if employees find out their access is more restricted than co-workers in similar positions.

The best kind of content filter is the one that allows legitimate items through while stopping the bad. Most modern filters give you the ability to do that, helping to ensure that you're protecting yourself from both a security and a legal standpoint, while possibly elevating the productivity of your employees.



Education in the Cloud

By Jack Smith

Throughout the last few decades, educational institutions have seen a variety of significant changes. Chalkboards are being replaced by whiteboards and smart boards, notebooks and lined paper is being switched out for classroom computers and tablets. And with this new technology comes a new way of keeping it all connected - the cloud.

Educational materials in the cloud

Another advancement in the lives of students is the availability of textbooks in the cloud. Now, instead of lugging around heavy backpacks and bags full of textbooks the size of dictionaries, students bring a single classroom computer or other mobile device to access their textbooks from the cloud. Earlier this year, one of the most widespread digital textbook programs was implemented, including 50 publishers shifting to make almost 30,000 accessible through the cloud.

The non-profit Educause and consortium Internet2, are working to make a plethora of e-textbooks available to college and university students across the nation. The program will also make course materials and resources available online, including homework, study outlines, course grades and other information. During the implementation and early adoption of the pilot program, Courseload CEO Mickey Levitan said the organizations involved would like to see the benefits experienced by institutions. "Also, we want to know how cloud-based services interoperate with campus systems and the unique device needs of students," said Internet2 senior vice president Shelton Waggener.

In addition to making textbooks and grades available, some university students are also using unified communication and collaboration platforms in the cloud. Notre Dame CIO and vice president Ron Kraemer said that students in the institution have been utilizing a classroom management software platform that allows them to share files and collaborate on projects all from the cloud. Students can have access to documents, visuals, presentation slides and a variety of other materials through the platform. In addition, they can make comments or changes to the content and share it with others in the network.

Bill Wroblewski, University of Michigan director of infrastructure services for Information and Technology Services, said that students also access calendars, emails and other tools from Google through the cloud. Wroblewski said the university created its five-year plan, NextGen Michigan, to rollout new technologies in the institution which would help foster research, teaching and learning. "Three main objectives of NextGen Michigan are collaboration, mobility and globalization," Wroblewski said. "Adopting cloud services like Box and Google help meet those objectives."

Data security in the cloud

Making data like textbooks, course materials, grades, email and other information available through the cloud definitely has its benefits. Students no longer need to tote heavy book bags around campus and can instead access everything they need to succeed through a single classroom computer. Additionally, these systems are scalable and flexible to meet the ever growing demands of educational institutions.

However, with these benefits also come risks. Kraemer said that his two main concerns are managing the data being stored in the cloud and keeping that information secure. However, by gaining a clear understanding of where data is stored and continually addressing threats, Kraemer said the platform and information is maintained.

Educational institutions, especially those making more sensitive applications and information like student grades and email available in the cloud, need to ensure that their platform is adequately protected against security threats. A school could be propelled into complete chaos should its email system, a main form of communication in universities today, crash or become inaccessible for an extended period of time. Additionally, sensitive data like student grades needs to be heavily secured to ensure unauthorized access does not occur and only select individuals like the student and teacher can view this information. Therefore, decision makers need to examine the security offerings of their service provider to ensure their data will be properly protected.

Jack Smith educational technology blogger loves to research and write about tools and tips for educators on how to integrate technology into everyday instruction creatively and effectively. Fond of reading and writing. My personal blog: <http://technologyuseforschool.wordpress.com/>

Tips to Keep Your Monthly Wireless Bill in Check

([NewsUSA](#)) - With the holidays upon us, trimming household expenses can free up extra cash to maximize your gift-giving budget. One place where you may not realize there are huge savings to be had is with your wireless bill. According to mobile phone analytics company Validas, 80 percent of Americans overspend on their monthly wireless bill by an average of \$200 annually. That's some significant savings you can apply to holiday shopping and throughout the year.



To make the most of your wireless service, and put some money back in your pocket for gift giving for the holidays, birthdays, anniversaries and other occasions, consider these cost-cutting tips from GoSmart Mobile:

1. Don't pay for what you don't need. Don't be fooled into thinking that unlimited-everything plans are the best option. Choosing a plan that meets your needs can save you hundreds to thousands of dollars annually. If you only occasionally browse the web and don't watch a lot of video on your phone, a plan with 2G/3G web speeds may be appropriate and economical for you. If you don't plan to use data, look for talk and/or text-only plans. Or look for a plan that gives you unlimited voice, text and data for a low price.
 2. Consider prepaid or "no contract" wireless plans. "No contract" wireless plans are a great option for budget-conscious consumers. GoSmart, for example, offers affordable, no-annual-contract plans on a reliable nationwide network with unlimited talk, text and web for only \$35 per month (plus taxes). You can go to www.GoSmartMobile.com for service and coverage details.
 3. Pay for your device upfront. Typically, when you purchase a new phone and sign up for or renew your service agreement, the carrier entices you by offering the device at a low price. What you may not realize is that carriers often charge higher monthly service fees to cover the cost of the handset subsidy. Instead, consider buying your own device and bringing it to a prepaid service like GoSmart to really be smart about how you spend.
 4. Monitor your usage and avoid overages. There are a number of free apps that can help you monitor your monthly usage and send updates or alerts when you are approaching your limit. Use a popular search engine to find what's best for you. Or, simply check your usage yourself via the Settings app in both Android-powered OS and iOS devices.
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Digital Book Options for Any Stage of Life

([NewsUSA](#)) - With the holiday season ramping up, there's no better time to take a break, relax and recharge. Why not unwind by catching up on all your favorite books? Whether you are looking to read by the fireplace or while traveling to your holiday destination, or spending time with friends and family, companies such as Kobo have a wide range of options to keep you reading on the go.

No matter what stage of life you may find yourself in, there's something to suit any taste or preference.

Going through your 20s can be trying. You have just left Mom and Dad's -- what do you do now? Why not consider books that will help you carve out your own path? There is "How to Be Interesting" by Jessica Hagy and "The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter -- And How to Make the Most of Them Now" by Meg Jay.

The 30s might have people thinking about starting a family, in which case, "Smart Parenting for Smart Kids: Nurturing Your Child's True Potential" by Eileen Kennedy-Moore and Mark S. Lowenthal is an informative and invaluable read. And for a bit of fun, "Bridget Jones's Diary" by Helen Fielding is sure to entertain.

Oftentimes, by their 40s, people are looking for a little romance or a thrill. Books such as "Inferno" by Dan Brown or "Committed" by Elizabeth Gilbert may have just this appeal.

When your 50s arrive, the kids are (hopefully) out of the house, and there is more time to read and travel. To that end, "Still Alice" by Lisa Genova or "Live By Night" by Dennis Lehane could be the perfect titles.

The 60s, or Golden Years, bring retirement and the ability to enjoy the things you love most. Whether it's spending time with family, keeping fit or curling up with a good book, there is "Beautiful Ruins" by Jess Walter or "Paris" by Edward Rutherfurd.

In addition to offering instant access to millions of titles online, digital reading companies offer a plethora of eReading device options and free reading apps for most smartphones and tablets, making it simple to expand on your reading adventure. Whatever your age -- young or old, married or single -- books are a source of entertainment, escape, inspiration, but most of all, enjoyment. To learn more, visit www.kobo.com.

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