

Content Filtering On A Dynamic Web

Pervasive Web-based security threats are prompting VARs to take a closer look at the value of sophisticated content filtering solutions.

BY CINDY DUBIN

The rules for how businesses manage Web-related content are very different from just 10 years ago. The static, text-based html environment of Web 1.0 was all about accessing the Internet to find information. The evolution into today's dynamic Web 2.0 has social networking taking center stage for individuals as well as corporations. Organizations see the benefits of leveraging the capabilities of the dynamic Web to market themselves to potential customers. Consider that 66% of Fortune 100 companies have a presence on Twitter, 46% are on Facebook, and 55% are on LinkedIn, according to statistics from Websense. And, employees within these organizations enjoy browsing sites like Google, Yahoo, Facebook, and Wikipedia. According to Websense, 80% of all Internet traffic visits these pages.

But here's the rub: "Because anyone can post on these sites, the content on them can be inappropriate and pose the threat of delivering information with malicious codes," says Dave Meizlik, director of product marketing for Web and data security at Websense. "And, companies can't block these sites because they are relevant to business today." So, if blocking isn't realistic, the alternative is to strictly monitor and control the content going into and out of an organization. Traditional gateway defenses are proving inadequate against today's Web-based malware, and URL filters treat Web-borne threats in a static way, leaving corporate networks exposed to potential dangers. "Legacy URL filtering solutions expose an organization to compliance and productivity risks introduced by inappropriate usage of the Web," says Vivek Bhandari, product manager for Cisco.

selectively blocking content and finely shading Internet policies. Sophisticated WCF blocks and/or allows content based on a business' Web policies. A VAR's entrée into WCF is through offering these solutions and helping customers rewrite their Web usage policies. For many companies, existing policies simply block employee access to certain sites. A Web filtering policy in today's dynamic online environment should drill down to the content level. For instance, a WCF could determine if a site's content poses a security risk at a certain point of time. Then, only that content would be blocked, not the entire Web page. It's not just about filtering, says Dave Reardon, VP of sales for Cymphonix. "That only solves 20% of your problem. It's about selective blocking." VARs can help companies begin to selectively block content by assessing employee Web practices. "This is a valuable roadmap that customers are willing to pay for," says Reardon.

To add value for customers, VARs can also put policies and controls in place that limit the sites employees visit, the time they visit these sites, and the information they view on the sites — all customized to that organization. For instance, employees may be allowed to visit travel websites for business travel, but not for personal use; employees may be allowed to browse Facebook for 15 minutes, not two hours, or access the site during certain times of the day that won't detract from productivity. "By helping companies enforce policies that are deemed appropriate for the business, VARs offer a real value proposition here," says Steve Pao, VP of product management at Barracuda Networks.

Web Usage Policies Are A Value Proposition

These antiquated security defenses are being replaced with dynamic Web Content Filtering (WCF) methods for

Mobility Drives Filtering Market

Defining usage policies should extend beyond the office walls to the mobile workforce. According to Forrester research, enterprise mobile workers will make up 73% of the workforce by 2012. Widespread Internet access and collaboration technologies are allowing businesses of all sizes to mobilize their workforces, and companies need to ensure that what's protected in the office is also protected on the road. A VAR can



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add value by ensuring that any content usage policies that apply to in-office computers are transferred easily to laptops. Meizlik says that mobile control policies need to be managed without “reinventing the wheel” of internal filtering procedures. “Separate management systems, separate policies, and separate deployments can be costly and cumbersome,” he says. “A hybrid car doesn’t have two gas pedals and two gas tanks. So, a company should not have two different sets of content filtering solutions.”

Ensuring similar usage policies is also important in the education community (K-12), as students take home school laptops. Schools want the same rules to apply outside of the school as inside, says Reardon, adding that the education community has a financial interest in implementing filter software to prevent children from accidentally visiting inappropriate sites. The federal Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) addresses access to offensive content over the Internet on school computers. CIPA imposes requirements on any school that receives funding for Internet access or internal connections from the E-rate program, which makes certain communications technology more affordable for eligible schools and libraries.

Communication technology is also critical for corporate road warriors — the sales team. Many have turned to cloud-based computing or Software as a Service (SaaS), which essentially allows applications and client files to be shared and stored online rather than on a hard drive. “This is also driving the need for content management solutions,” says Bhandari. “Cloud computing allows mobile workers to collaborate online. A major challenge in adopting these services is managing user authentication and entitlements. Administrators want to control which users have access to which services.”

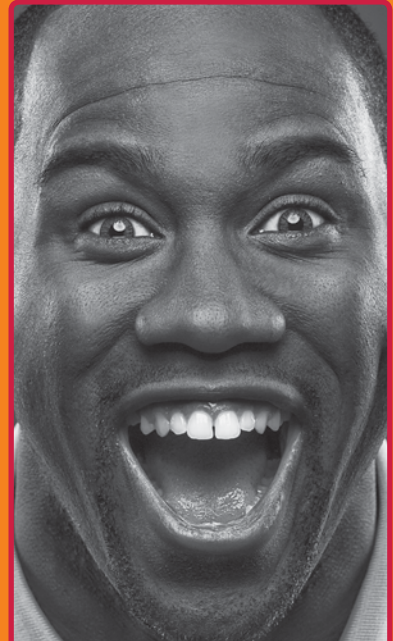
A WCF eases this process by signing onto the target website on behalf of the employee by using Security Assertion Markup Language (SAML) 2.0. Administrators retain control over access rights, and employees gain access to corporate resources, without control or security being sacrificed.

VARs Must Find IT Hot Buttons

The growth of the Web content filtering market, which Frost & Sullivan predicts will reach \$4.86 billion in 2012, indicates that industries are not about to sacrifice control or security. The increased demand for technology has allowed new solutions providers to enter the market and has given VARs an opportunity to enhance their product offerings by incorporating content filtering capabilities into their product lines. VARs that bundle content filtering technology with other security technologies — routers, firewalls, and anti-virus programs — are likely to bring in market revenue.

In an effort to determine which verticals present revenue-building opportunities, St. Bernard Software recently surveyed midenterprise companies about their current and future use of WCF practices. Steve Yin, St. Bernard’s executive VP of sales and marketing, says the results indicate that manufacturing, commercial, financial, and healthcare institutions are among the verticals most likely to benefit from using WCF, as they rely on Web 2.0 tools to market products and get closer to customers.

Once VARs understand how to sell a WCF and promote its benefits, they can bring real value to the table. “Some VARs understand the WCF space, but many still need to educate themselves beyond URL blocking,” says Reardon. “WCF is an emerging trend and is very different from the primitive controls of the past.” Convincing smaller operations to adapt can be tough. For midsize and larger operations, WCF is a known entity and needs to happen, says Yin. VARs need to convince senior management and IT folks that WCF is an effective way of monitoring employees’ online practices, he says. “This is their hot button. In 2010, it’s all about being more efficient. VARs have to come in with the value proposition that today’s Web filtering solutions offer an efficient, sophisticated method of content control.” ●



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