

Spam no Joke for Comic Relief



SOFTSCAN CASE STUDY

Launched in 1985 from a refugee camp in the Sudan, Comic Relief is seriously committed to helping end poverty and social injustice in the UK and the poorest countries in the world.

Over the years, thousands of celebrities have given their time and talent to Comic Relief and although it is probably best known for Red Nose Day, Comic Relief is involved in many other activities including Sport Relief, Debt Wish and Fair Trade.

As the organisation has evolved and matured, it fully recognises the benefits that new technology can offer and is therefore keen to maximise its use – not least in terms of innovation, but also for improving overall efficiency and effectiveness as well as reducing costs. Like many organisations today, Comic Relief sees e-mail as performing a business-critical function, providing a key communications medium that all staff rely on to be there and working when they need it.

“Unfortunately the world has now changed, and we are all now being bombarded with unwanted spam and other malicious email, which can potentially increase overheads that may begin to outweigh some of the benefits of using email,” explains John Thompson, Information Systems Manager of Comic Relief.

“We had systems in place to deal with spam,” he continues. “But eventually it required a vast amount of human intervention – up to two hours a day and even then spam would still get through. The volume was such that it became not just an issue in loss of productivity, but it was affecting our bandwidth too. Although we had considered other managed services, when we looked into what they actually offered, none of them seemed to meet our needs. That was of course until we started talking to SoftScan.”

Stopping spam before it reaches the gateway

After discussing Comic Relief’s needs with SoftScan, a trial was arranged to fully evaluate their system, which is an award-winning, hosted email security service that provides protection against spam, viruses, phishing and other email threats. It soon became apparent just how effective the system was, and subsequently it was agreed to put this in place on a permanent basis.

SoftScan now relieves Comic Relief from the burden of managing an in-house anti-spam system, by scanning all of Comic Relief’s emails and preventing spam from reaching the charity’s network. This reduces considerably the amount of email delivered to its email server, therefore increasing bandwidth availability and generally improving network and server performance.

“The great thing about SoftScan is that it still leaves us in control of our email security, but takes away the hassle and time consuming tasks of managing and supporting an in-house system.”



Updated automatically every fifteen minutes, SoftScan's Spam Filter scans every email, learning and improving with every mail it stops. The filter consists of several thousand rules that assign a number of points to each email – based on the content, behaviour etc. If enough points are given, the mail is stopped. This enables SoftScan to be very effective with an extremely low margin of error.

Managing spam only takes 10 minutes

“One of the great things about SoftScan is that it is so simple to use, but is very effective at what it does. Unlike other hosted email security services, SoftScan is not so sophisticated that you spend more time trying to configure the service than you did before. Now managing our email protection takes ten minutes, not two hours. It's extremely good at what it does and very cost effective.”

In the first three months of using SoftScan, Comic Relief received over 600,000 emails. SoftScan stopped 48.9%, nearly 300,000 emails, after identifying them as containing either spam, viruses or other types of suspicious content. It was during this time that Sport Relief, which in 2004 raised over £18m to help fight against poverty, took place. Therefore it was critical to Comic Relief that legitimate emails came through as soon as possible and that their users were released from the productivity constraints of junk email.

“Only a very small percentage of the email that

SoftScan stopped was legitimate and even some of that was not their fault as we have many legitimate sources of email that end up on blacklists through no fault of their own. But with SoftScan we can release these easily and with the minimum of inconvenience to users. A daily email acts a timely reminder, so no matter how hectic the day gets there is always a friendly nudge.

The great thing about SoftScan is that it still leaves us in control of our email security, but takes away the hassle and time consuming tasks of managing and supporting an in-house system. It's simplicity of use means that no training is required and you can be up and running in minutes.”



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