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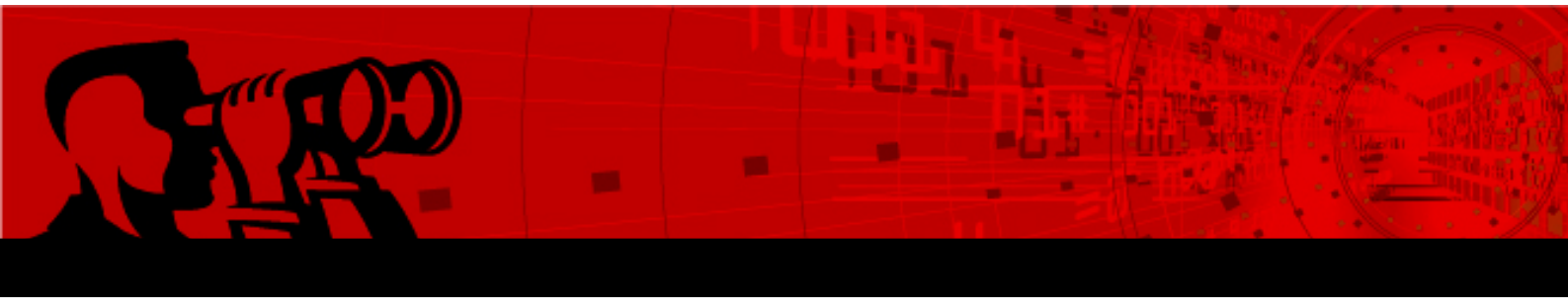

Case Study

International Investment Bank Shows Returns on Commtouch Spam Control

Houlihan Lokey Howard & Zukin Houlihan Lokey Howard & Zukin (www.hlhz.com) is an international investment bank that provides a wide range of financing and advisory services. Ranked among the top 20 M&A advisors in the United States for the past 11 years, it has the largest financial restructuring practice of any investment bank in the world.

Constant dissatisfaction with the time spent by email users on spam, including complaints from company executives, convinced HLHZ's IT department that the spam problem had to be resolved. Initially, HLHZ tried blocking known spammer addresses and domains with the help of a commercial software product. However, even with continuous updates requiring significant management effort, as spammers became more inventive and spam volumes tripled, the solution did not block enough spam and false positives reached an unreasonable level due to domain blocking.

In spring 2003, HLHZ deployed a second commercial antispam software product that was self-managed, automatically updated, and touted zero false positives. This product was effective in blocking about 15,000–18,000 messages daily, but email users complained that too much spam — approximately 10–15 messages daily — still reached their inboxes.

Evaluation Put Commtouch Way Ahead

When HLHZ heard about Commtouch's RPD technology, it decided to conduct a side-by-side comparison with its existing system. After 3–4 weeks of running spam messages received in test mailboxes through both systems, the Commtouch solution missed only 2 spam messages, while the other system missed 129 spam messages. HLHZ began deploying the Commtouch solution in fall 2003 as an addition to the existing spam solution, acting as a complimentary filter. HLHZ has experienced very positive results. Email users report that only 0–2 spam messages reach inboxes on average each day with the Commtouch solution. Senior executives have stopped the CIO in the hallway to say, "The spam thing that IT did is working really well."

The IT staff appreciates the minimal administration time needed to keep the Commtouch solution running smoothly. One example is that spam quarantine folders are created quickly and easily in Microsoft Outlook by adding email users to an antispam group in Microsoft Exchange. The software is easily installed when users click on their quarantine folder without any administrator privileges. Another example is a recent software upgrade that was accomplished in the middle of the workday without any disruption.

Low False Positives, Minimum Administration

A unique feature identified by HLHZ is the way the Commtouch solution can hold suspected spam for a specified amount of time and then recheck it with the latest information about new spam attack waves. HLHZ's other system tended to allow new spam messages get through before the system's spam database was updated, and therefore it was unable to recognize the messages as spam. When the Commtouch system occasionally suspects legitimate newsletters or other bulk mailings as spam, these emails are quarantined in the junk mail folder.

Email users can subsequently review their junk mail folders and approve the legitimate mailings and exempt them from future quarantine by clicking a single button. Overall, HLHZ is very pleased with the Commtouch solution's effectiveness in detecting spam, very low false positives, and minimal administration.