

## Stanford University

## HIGHER EDUCATION

California's Stanford University is one of the most prestigious in the world. It processes in excess of 500,000 emails per day. When the volume of complaints from its 22,000 email users about spam became unacceptable, the university evaluated a number of anti-spam products. Choosing PureMessage enabled Stanford University to offer client-side filtering to its users, and to preserve its academic privacy.



*Clark Center, Stanford University School of Medicine  
L. A. Cicero, Stanford University News Service*

### Business challenge

Founded in 1885, Stanford University boasts a current enrollment of approximately 14,000, and the faculty of the Academic Council numbers more than 1,300. Educational programs are conducted through 70 departments in seven schools: Business, Earth Sciences, Education, Engineering, Humanities and Sciences, Law, and Medicine.

The university has 22,000 email user accounts and processes more than half a million messages every day. Until recently, spam levels were low enough that it was viewed as merely a nuisance, rather than a serious problem for users and the IT department. As the amount of spam grew, the Security Office set up a "junkmail" address to collect complaints, but quickly became overwhelmed by the volume.

### Key facts

**Organization**

Stanford University

**Location**

Stanford, California

**No of users**

22,000

**Servers**

7 dual-CPU Sun Netra 20,  
Solaris

**Email traffic**

500,000 messages per day

**Solution**

PureMessage for UNIX

*"PureMessage has generated more spontaneous positive comments from users than any other service we've implemented in the past three years."*

*Tom Cramer, Director of  
Technology Infrastructure,  
ITSS, Stanford University*

According to Xueshan Feng, Technical Manager, Information Technology Systems and Services (ITSS) at Stanford, "It wasn't long before we were receiving in excess of 800 complaints each day from faculty and students. With no method of dealing with the spammers, we decided to shut down the mailbox and research more effective solutions." Despite budget constraints, ITSS made implementing filtering software a priority because, Feng says, "the increase in spam created a loss of productivity, wasted computing resources and time, and also affected our reputation. The view was: Can't a reputable university like Stanford do something to stop spam?"

## Technology solution

The Stanford team evaluated several products before selecting PureMessage. Feng maintains, "The most important considerations for us were the system's effectiveness in terms of low false positives and false negatives, minimal impact on mail throughput, and ease of maintenance and cost. 'ISP-type' solutions were dismissed because of the administrative burden in deployment, and the effort required for integration. Plus we did not want to rely on someone else's network when we're comfortable managing our own mail servers."

Other products revealed performance issues during evaluation. One rules-based approach was extremely slow in mail delivery, and the catch rate was unacceptable. "It only recognized 10% of our incoming mail as spam, when we knew the number was closer to 25%," Feng comments.

Stanford University also wanted a mature solution from an established vendor. More expensive products were ruled out for budgetary reasons, but although PureMessage was more cost-effective, the University did not sacrifice accuracy. Tom Cramer, ITSS Director of Technology Infrastructure, says, "Our major concern was false positives, and we've seen very few."



The team installed PureMessage in October 2002, and collected user feedback for one month before full implementation. "The installation was very simple and straightforward, and the out-of-the-box configuration was accurate," says Feng. "PureMessage hasn't required any customization beyond configuring our whitelist to include our users' opt-in lists, and opting out users who don't want their mail tagged at all."

The university runs PureMessage on seven dual-CPU Sun Netra 20 servers running Solaris, and has configured the system so that spam isn't just blocked automatically. In the Stanford Report, Cedric Bennett, ITSS Director of Information Security Services, explains this common concern of educational institutions: "blocking spam might infringe on users' academic freedom or privacy."

## Business results

Feng concurs, adding, "The ability of PureMessage to tag spam and still pass it on to the end users for client-side filtering is very important to us. PureMessage has really improved productivity – it's obviously a win-win implementation."

Cramer adds, "There has been a great deal of positive feedback. Spam is the bane of so many people's daily lives, so they relish the ability to manage it more easily. Implementing PureMessage has generated more spontaneous positive comments from users than any other service we've implemented in the past three years."

According to one satisfied user, "PureMessage is user-friendly, and has routinely filtered out spam messages without any mistakes so far. Spam used to flood my mailbox repeatedly – now messages are all neatly tagged and sent to their rightful destination. Thank you for a job well done!"

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