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CNET Improves Deliverability with IronPort's Bonded Sender Program.

SITUATION

CNET Networks Inc., the San Francisco-based global media company, emails over 100 million newsletters per month to its subscribers.

This isn't spam: it's clearly news. Earlier this year, the company's News.com site won the National Magazine Award for general excellence, and its newsletter recipients have not only explicitly requested their subscriptions, they've re-confirmed their requests via a second transactional email message.

Unfortunately, many CNET subscribers still don't receive the email messages they have requested because spam filters accidentally intercept them. These lost messages – or "false positives" – are a problem not only for subscribers, but CNET as well. With revenues of \$275 mil-

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CNET AT A GLANCE

Founded: 1993
 Revenue: \$275 million (est. 2004)
 Web Traffic: 76.5 million unique visitors
 (most recent quarter)
 Employees: 1700

THE BONDED SENDER PROGRAM ADVANTAGE

- Deliverability improved by 15 percent
- Reduction of staff time spent on ISP relations
- Easy Implementation
- Less risk of false-positives for transactional email

lion, from operations in 6 countries, CNET's reach and influence is enormous: in Q1 of 2004, the company had 76.5 million unique visitors.

CNET's revenues depend on users receiving these email newsletters, so ensuring the delivery is critical, and IronPort's Bonded Sender Program helps make that happen.

TECHNICAL CHALLENGES

Despite CNET's careful mailing practices and continuous outreach to ISPs, ensuring email delivery is a constant challenge. Newsletters from CNET, ZDNet, TechRepublic, News.com, GameSpot, and Builder.com, as well as transactional email messages, have all been blocked from time to time by different ISPs and spam filters.

"Our users have opted in and confirmed their request via a second message, and yet these newsletters are sometimes still marked as spam," says Travis Frazier, a project manager at CNET responsible for outbound email.

In fact, prior to its use of IronPort's Bonded Sender and IronPort's anti-spam technology, CNET had implemented popular open source anti-spam products, which occasionally but erroneously caught CNET's own newsletters. "That was an eye-opener," Frazier says.

THE BONDED SENDER SOLUTION

Widely recognized as the leading third-party accreditation and white-list solution, membership in the Bonded Sender Program brought CNET's email operations significant value immediately.

Dramatically Improved Deliverability

CNET chose IronPort's Bonded Sender Program to improve the deliverability of its email newsletters only after rigorous testing, as well as some failed trials of competing services. The Bonded Sender Program provides users with a rich set of administrative tools to help users monitor their outbound mailings, and identify problems in advance, and CNET used these heavily.

In a series of 63 test campaigns involving 300 million messages, CNET found that the number of messages opened by recipients increased by 15

percent when using the Bonded Sender Program.

"We believe our open rates increased 15 percent because companies and ISPs that were black-holding our email are now allowing it through," Frazier says.

Simplified ISP Relations

In addition to improving deliverability, the Bonded Sender Program has also benefited CNET's IT staff by reducing the amount of time spent resolving problems with operations staff at ISPs.

Organizations participating in the Bonded Sender Program, which is certified by TRUSTe, now handle more than 25 percent of all email traffic on the Internet. In all, more than 34,000 receiving domains, including MSN and Hotmail, rely on the Bonded Sender Program as their white-list.

Implemented Easily

The Bonded Sender Program took CNET less than a week to implement, and required no changes to the company's email system configuration. "Because our mailing practices were already good, we didn't have to do anything to use Bonded Sender except add our IP addresses to their list, and cut the check," Frazier says. "We didn't have to reconfigure our equipment at all."

Reduced Risk of False-Positives for Transactional Mail

The next step for CNET, Frazier says, is to begin using the Bonded Sender Program for transactional emails such as, subscription confirmations and notices of account changes. "We have less of this kind of traffic, but it is very valuable to us," he explains. "There's an even higher cost to us when there is a false positive in that traffic – when someone can't confirm their address, they can't subscribe to our newsletters, receive new passwords, or complete other transactions."

For other email senders, Frazier suggests that promised sender authentication services such as Sender ID will only offer a partial solution. "Even when mail authentication becomes common, you will still need something that provides reputation scoring," he says. "You will need an email reputation service as part of your business, and the sooner you solve that problem, the better."



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ABOUT IRONPORT SYSTEMS

IronPort Systems is the leading email security provider for organizations ranging from small businesses to the Global 2000. The company has developed a family of email security appliances, the IronPort C-Series™, that offer breakthrough performance, unprecedented ease of use and reduced total cost of ownership. IronPort is driving new standards and providing innovative products for those faced with the monumental task of managing, protecting, and growing mission-critical email systems. For more information on IronPort products and services, visit: www.ironport.com