



Education

Ease-of-use, Economy, Security and Performance Top Selection Criteria for School District Email Servers

The Victoria Independent School District (VISD) of Victoria, Texas, USA, needed Windows-based email servers capable of handling several thousand users, both staff and students.

The servers needed to be easy to use and secure from the expected attacks from outside breakins, viruses and spam plus possible inside intrusions from talented and ambitious students.

Budgets, including personnel costs, are always major concerns of public school districts, so the total cost of ownership had to be low in terms of cash outlays and professional support.

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The VISD found what they needed in MDAemon and SecurityPlus for MDAemon.

“We originally chose MDAemon because it was simple and cost effective,” said Randy Williams, who heads Management Information Services for the VISD.

The school district now has two MDAemon servers—one for staff and one for students.

The low cost of ownership and ease-of-use have proven themselves. The average cost of running two email servers for the past four years has been approximately \$5,750 annually. This includes two new hardware servers, plus two sets of unlimited licenses for MDAemon and SecurityPlus.

“While there are some staff costs for maintenance and upkeep,” said Williams, “they are minimal when compared with other systems.”

Williams handles most routine maintenance on the systems. Excluding account maintenance Williams about two hours a month on the servers.

Currently, account maintenance is done manually. Mr. Williams is planning an ODBC interface to provide for automated account updates tied to the main staff and student databases.



Customer Profile

The Victoria Independent School District (VISD) serves Victoria, Texas and some smaller adjacent communities.

Victoria County is the transportation crossroads of south central Texas, sitting at the intersection of Austin, San Antonio, Houston and Corpus Christi.

The population of the metropolitan area is more than 80,000. The VISD is the largest single employer with more than 2,400 staff members. The district educates more than 14,700 students.

Challenge

Supply secure, low-cost email service to more than 2,200 staff and 14,000 students on 24 campuses.

Solution

MDAemon Email Server

SecurityPlus for MDAemon

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Randy Williams, Director MIS
Victoria Independent School District

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System Configuration

The previous email system at the VISD was for in-house use only. It ran on an older VAX computer and had no Internet connection. Today, all 24 VISD campuses are serviced by T1s. The central administration offices use a DS3 connection to the Internet.

The school district staff was first to have MDAemon email with Internet access. Two years later a separate MDAemon server came online for the students.

Each server runs on a dedicated machine. Both systems provide email account access from either the built-in WorldClient web mail application or from standalone email clients.

Making every student email literate by the eighth grade is one of the measurable education goals of the Victoria Independent School District. With this in mind every student has a private email account. The current number of student accounts is more than 14,700.

When setting up these accounts, Williams used MDAemon's batch import process. "Batch initializing the accounts saved a tremendous amount of staff time by not having to enter 14,000 names manually," Williams said. "In addition, the staff machine hosts more than 2,400 accounts."

To fight viruses, the district uses SecurityPlus for MDAemon and subscribes to the update service. SecurityPlus works well for the VISD. "Most virus issues can generally be traced back to private email accounts being accessed on district equipment, not from our email servers," Williams said.

For reducing spam, the servers use the built-in Spam Blocker, Spam Filter, Content Filtering, address suppression, IP screening and host screening.

"We have recently enabled the Bayesian system and created a public folder for users to move the SPAM messages into for the system to learn," said Williams.

HIPPA and Email Security

Like many Enterprises, the VISD must address the issues of the Health Insurance Portability Act of 1996 (HIPPA)

Many public schools are self-insured and work through a management company. A great deal of that communication is done by email and file transfers.

HIPPA obligates employers to keep their employees' health information confidential. If email or other files containing sensitive health information are intercepted off the network or email server that could create a liability on the part of the employer.

MDaemon's built-in security functions help the VISD keep confidential health information from being accessed by unauthorized persons.



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