



U.S. Air Force Deploys Blue Coat Secure Proxy Appliances as Global Base Standard for Content Filtering

Blue Coat ProxySG™ with SmartFilter® provides Web filtering and content delivery for 250,000 users

From the IRS to the DMV, government agencies need effective ways to manage employee Web access. Not only does inappropriate and unapproved Web access harm productivity, increase exposure to legal liability and waste precious bandwidth – it also makes government agencies vulnerable to devastating security attacks. The challenge: finding a flexible solution for filtering Web content that doesn't impact performance or access to mission-critical Web applications.

The U.S. Air Force recently found just such a solution. The service chose Blue Coat Systems with Secure Computing for high-performance Web filtering and content security for 250,000 users at 106 Air Force bases worldwide. Blue Coat ProxySG 800 appliances running Secure Computing's SmartFilter software give the Air Force a single, integrated tool for managing Web access and enforcing security policies, while ensuring network performance and quality of service.

Company Background

The mission of the U.S. Air Force is to defend the United States and protect its interests through aerospace power. Like all government agencies today, the service depends on information technology as a way to continue transforming its operational capabilities. Key to these efforts is the ability to facilitate fast, secure communications among personnel worldwide. With a population that numbers more than 300,000 – well over the size of the largest multi-national corporation – this is no easy task.

The Challenge

When it comes to controlling Web access, the Air Force faces the same challenges as many private enterprises: finding a way to create and enforce a Web filtering policy that supports business-critical uses, while preventing abuse that can eat up bandwidth, ruin productivity and expose the armed service to liability.

The problem was that as the number of users and the total amount of traffic on its network grew, the Air Force found that policy enforcement and user control began to demand more and more bandwidth in order to provide adequate end-user performance. In addition, increased Web communication was pushing Air Force firewalls to their performance limits.

The Air Force wanted a Web filtering solution that would:

- Help the service enforce its standard Internet usage policy while giving bases a high level of flexibility to customize policies
- Enable high-performance Web content filtering and control
- Allow the service to take advantage of emerging communication technologies such as instant messaging (IM) and advanced Web virus protection

In addition, because Air Force personnel move so frequently, the service needed a solution that would require little training and could even be managed remotely. Limited physical space also necessitated a system that could be easily installed in existing telephone switching rooms. This ruled out software-only filtering solutions, which would require PCs and their accompanying peripherals.

Highlights

Company

U.S. Air Force

Industry/Market

Government

Application

Content Filtering

Business Challenges

- Manage and control access to Web content for 250,000 users at 106 bases worldwide.
- Enable Web content filtering without impacting end-user performance.

Solution

- Blue Coat ProxySG 800 appliances running SmartFilter software from Secure Computing are now the base standard for high-performance Web filtering and content delivery.

Key Results

- Single, integrated Blue Coat appliance running SmartFilter software enables easy set-up and simplified management and administration.
- Flexible policy architecture allows a granular level of Web access control, customized to meet each base's requirements.
- Solution leverages Blue Coat's proxy expertise to increase control of user Web access, without impacting network performance.
- Custom Blue Coat operating environment is purpose-built and hardened, providing the optimal platform for URL filtering and resulting in higher price-performance.
- Extensive reporting features allow the Air Force to analyze usage patterns in depth in order to adjust policies and increase ROI.

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“Because the units would be going into a switching room rather than a data center, the Air Force wanted a simple appliance-based solution that was physically compact and appropriate for a ‘lights-out’, unmanned environment,” says Scott Brunstrom, Blue Coat systems engineer.

The Solution

The U.S. Air Force selected Blue Coat’s ProxySG 800 series appliances running Secure Computing’s SmartFilter software as its Web filtering standard for 250,000 users at 106 Air Force bases worldwide. The Air Force chose Blue Coat for several reasons.

First, the integration of the Blue Coat ProxySG appliances with Secure Computing’s SmartFilter software provides the Air Force with a single Internet access and Web communication control tool that is extremely easy to set up and manage, installing in minutes with little ongoing maintenance.

“Because our system is an appliance rather than a software-based solution, it can be quickly deployed and easily managed,” says Brunstrom. “The Air Force won’t need to worry about downloading and installing patches, and any upgrades can be handled remotely.”

Blue Coat’s advanced policy processing architecture provides the Air Force with an extremely high amount of control over content filtering. The service can build and enforce its standard Internet usage policy based on several criteria, including:

Content categories: The Blue Coat appliances run SmartFilter, which uses an international URL Control List to categorize millions of Web sites into content groups.

Content type: This capability allows the Air Force to block certain types of content – such as HTTP, ftp, streaming or mime type – in real-time within Web pages.

Identity: The Air Force can customize policies based on both the identity of the users and their location, group or network.

Each base can customize the Internet access policy as necessary to optimize local network performance and control user Web communications. In addition, the Blue Coat appliances can generate custom error pages that “coach” users on company policy and inform employees that Internet access is being monitored and controlled.

Secondly, the SmartFilter software’s On-Box™ architecture is pre-installed on the Blue Coat appliances, which eliminates the need for additional hardware and results in even faster filtering.

Another differentiator was Blue Coat’s custom operating system, which incorporates Blue Coat’s advanced policy

processing technology for applying security, access, filtering and performance policies for any Web transaction. Unlike the operating environments of less-sophisticated security appliances, Blue Coat’s OS is not built from an existing, general-purpose operating system that has been stripped of non-essential functions. Rather, it is a purpose-built, hardened OS for safeguarding and controlling access to Web content in highly sensitive environments, such as the Air Force’s.

“The Blue Coat OS is designed specifically for content filtering, and such delivers much higher price-performance than a general-purpose operating system,” says Brunstrom.

SmartFilter’s integrated Cyfin® Reporter allows the Air Force to perform detailed analysis on all Web surfing activity and create a wide variety of HTML-based reports showing detailed, outbound Web usage activities, trends and savings. The Air Force can thus make any adjustments necessary and realize immediate ROI resulting from increased productivity and recaptured network bandwidth.

Finally, the Blue Coat solution gives the Air Force a way to incorporate technologies such as advanced Web virus protection and instant messaging control into its network as its needs evolve.

“We’re constantly adding new features and capabilities,” says Brunstrom. “When the Air Force is ready to incorporate applications like instant messaging, Blue Coat will have already been supporting them for some time. The Air Force knows our track record and that we deliver what we say we’re going to.”

The Results

The Air Force has already experienced significant benefits from the Blue Coat filtering solution. One of these benefits is that the service has been able to move its Web traffic off its firewalls and run it through the Blue Coat secure proxy appliances. The Air Force can now use its firewalls to protect non-Web applications such as email and telnet services.

Other benefits include:

- Simplified management and administration, as the result of using a single, integrated secure proxy appliance optimized for Web content filtering
- Granular Web communication control based on users, groups, time of day, location, network address, user agent, and other attributes customized to meet unique base requirements
- Minimized legal liability and improved user productivity
- Comprehensive visibility and reporting on Web access throughout the service.