

Designers sleep soundly thanks to RainWall for Clearswift MIMESweeper

Based in Blackburn, Lancashire, Graham & Brown is one of the longest-established manufacturers of wallpapers and interior design fabrics in the United Kingdom. Despite a dramatic reduction in the market for its products, caused by a change in fashion away from wall coverings that has seen the downfall of many of its competitors, the company is thriving.

Largely this success is thanks to its decision to concentrate on quality products backed by well-known designers. This strategy has helped them become the primary own-brand supplier of interior fabrics and wallpapers to all the major UK decorating outlets such as Homebase, Focus and B&Q.

Malicious Attacks

However, success does bring its problems as Dean Morris, Systems Analyst, at Graham and Brown comments. “With such a high profile, the company has attracted more than its fair share of Internet attacks ranging from everyday SPAM to malicious mails”.

For Graham & Brown, who process over 2,000 legitimate emails a day, the SPAM numbers were “depressingly high”, so Dean set about finding a solution. Initially the company contracted an external agency to filter inbound mails, but even with this resource found it needed another layer of content scanning. “We decided to add to the external filtering, so implemented Clearswift’s MIMESweeper for SMTP application running on a Windows 2000 server. This was a very successful move, as we found that the combination of this and the outsourced service now filters out over 99% of the unwanted traffic”.

However, there was still one piece of the jigsaw that was not in place, as Dean explains. “We were running the mail happily, but we were acutely aware that with a single server, we also had a single point of failure. Any time we needed to carry out any maintenance or upgrades, we had to close the server down, which immediately meant the mail stopped flowing. As we are an international business that wasn’t really a sustainable option”.



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Dean Morris - Systems Analyst



GRAHAM & BROWN



Not Satisfactory

Graham & Brown knew that the desired solution would require implementation of a second MIMESweeper server. However, Dean's search for load balancing solutions did not initially produce practical results. "Many applications in the market, to carry out mail failover, use an active/passive architecture, which means that you have one server sitting there doing nothing while the other does all the work until it fails. To us that did not seem a satisfactory approach".

Dean began the search for alternative solutions, and contacted Oxygen, a specialist in IT Security and high availability systems. Oxygen suggested that Dean consider Rainfinity's RainWall application.

Guaranteeing uptime

James Cook, Oxygen's Sales Manager, takes up the story. "Like many organisations Graham & Brown have successfully embraced the concept of using clustered servers. This brings together a group of servers to act collectively, so that if any one fails or has to be taken down for maintenance, its workload is taken up seamlessly by the others. Graham & Brown are always aiming to achieve 100% uptime, the idea of any single point of failure, or bottleneck in the network, did not sit at all easily with them. We visited them and discussed their options, and of all the paths open to them RainWall for MIMESweeper seemed by far the most appropriate as it gave robustness, failover and load balancing in a single package".

Another operational consideration that sat high on Dean's list was the ability to take a MIMESweeper server out of action to perform maintenance or upgrades. "We often have to install upgrades and patches such as new virus definitions or profanity filters, and I'm always a little concerned about doing so on a live server. The RainWall promise of being able to just take a server out of action and not affect mail traffic, on top of everything else it offered, almost made it seem too good to be true".

Extremely Impressed

"When the software arrived I was immediately impressed", he continues. "Implementation took less than an hour and the configuration was extremely easy through the web-based interface. As soon as it was implemented, it started to do its job and we were immediately able to see how the email load was being shared effectively across the two servers. The idea of running all our mail through a single server was totally out of sync with the overall network strategy, so once we saw how easily RainWall was implemented and how well it did its job we knew it was the ideal solution".

Since then, according to Dean, the application has performed perfectly. "We had a failure on one of the MIMESweeper servers that happened overnight. Something spiked the server and it fell over totally – a full blue screen job. We came in the next morning to find one server down, but RainWall had both switched the traffic and retrieved mail that had been in process on the failed server. As a result there was no disruption to users".

"From our point of view that was an excellent result", he continues. "We rebooted the server, sorted out the problem and put it back into service. It's the only failure we've had, but on that single occasion alone, RainWall would have paid for itself. I can honestly say it is a superb product".



For more information about Rainfinity's products contact Oxygen Secure Systems