

## University of Leeds

## HIGHER EDUCATION

In the last 100 years the University of Leeds has grown into the UK's largest civic university, with a worldwide reputation for the quality of its teaching and research. Its 70,000 email users found the simple, central blocking of spam messages unacceptable, so the university selected Sophos PureMessage from a number of competitors, to give end users more control of their own mail.



### Key facts

**Organisation**

University of Leeds

**Location**

Leeds, UK

**Workstations**

8,000 plus

**No of mailboxes**

70,000 plus

**Email traffic**

300,000 plus per day

**Servers**

2 Solaris dual-CPU

**Solution**

PureMessage for UNIX

## Business challenge

The University of Leeds, founded one hundred years ago, is one of the largest in the UK. It currently has more than 30,000 full-time students, with a further 50,000 enrolled on short courses. Its size and international reputation enables the university to offer 700 first degree programmes – one of the widest ranges of academic courses in the country.

There are more than 8,000 computers at Leeds University, and a high value is placed on the quality and integrity of information technology. In order to safeguard the open communication environment required by academics, the university's Information Systems Service

(ISS) has encouraged users in best computing practice, making them aware of the risks of viruses and spam. ISS also took basic precautions to block spam at the gateway, such as using an RBL (real-time blackhole list) service and reverse DNS (domain name system) checks.

According to Qin Li, Email Services Coordinator in ISS, these measures blocked 10% of the 300,000 emails received by the university each day. In early 2003, an email filtering service was introduced that blocked a further 40% of this traffic, but this was withdrawn after criticism from staff and students about censorship.

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*Qin Li,  
Email Services Coordinator,  
Information Systems Services,  
University of Leeds*

## Technology solution

Qin Li explains, "ISS had to balance continuing complaints about spam against freedom of communication. We looked at a number of competing anti-spam solutions, and chose Sophos PureMessage after a three-month evaluation on the student webmail service. Subsequent rollout to the campus email gateway was seamless." He continues, "PureMessage is now the first line of defence for most campus servers and workstations, including UNIX and Exchange mail servers."

A key factor influencing the choice of PureMessage was its ability to tag suspect messages with a spam probability, enabling users to filter their own emails based on information provided in standard headers. Users' confidence in the concept of email filtering was raised by educating them in how to handle spam, and by offering a choice of whether or not to receive a digest of quarantined messages, so that later in 2003 more control could be given to them. This helped to reduce false positives – mail tagged as spam that the user would otherwise regard as legitimate. Users are now actively involved in ensuring that their spam is accurately identified.

## Business results

Qin Li says, "Around three-quarters of our total mail volume is now tagged by PureMessage with an 80%-plus probability of being spam. Our users are currently happy to rely on its tag-and-pass facility, but PureMessage gives us the flexibility to respond to users' changing requirements. We monitor their views continuously and will adjust our virus and spam policies to satisfy their needs."



He adds, "We use PureMessage's Extended Policy module to blacklist certain attachment types, and use subsets of rules for particular email domains. Users can fine-tune the mail filtering rules at the email client, and will be able to configure their own whitelists and blacklists."

An important factor in choosing Sophos was the need for 24/7 support. "Initially, we used Sophos support regularly to solve operational issues and to fine-tune the server for optimal performance," says Qin Li. "But Leeds University has staff accessing email from around the world, so we must be able to provide a round-the-clock service." He continues, "We get rapid updates from Sophos, and PureMessage offers great flexibility and control, with remote administration that is platform-independent."

The licensing structure and return on investment offered by PureMessage is ideal for the University of Leeds. Dissatisfied with the speed of updates provided by its previous anti-virus package, ISS has also decided to make use of the powerful Sophos Anti-Virus engine as part of the PureMessage licence. It is now able to handle major virus outbreaks, such as mass-mailing worms, more easily, ensuring that delivery of legitimate email is not delayed.

Qin Li concludes, "We are expecting to increase the number of our core mail servers, and possibly add virtual domain support. Sophos has a good reputation in the industry, and we feel that PureMessage gives us a roadmap to the future."



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