

## Virginia Mason Medical Center

## HEALTHCARE

Virginia Mason Medical Center – a private, integrated health services organization based in Seattle, Washington – recently purchased Sophos PureMessage to combat computer viruses, spam and other email-borne threats. In addition to blocking viruses and catching over 98% of unsolicited email, PureMessage’s email policy enforcement capabilities are ensuring best practices for legislative compliance.



### Key facts

#### Organization

Virginia Mason Medical Center

#### Location

Seattle, Washington, USA

#### No of users

3800

#### Email traffic

1.5 million per month

#### Solution

PureMessage for UNIX

## Business challenge

Virginia Mason Medical Center (VMMC) was established in 1920 as an 80-bed hospital with six physician offices. Since then, it has grown to become an internationally recognized group practice of more than 400 physicians and 336 beds, offering both primary and specialized acute care. With nearly 4000 email users, VMMC processes more than 1.5 million email messages each month. Before deploying Sophos PureMessage, 75% of all email received was either spam or messages containing viruses.

Michael Spohnholtz, Senior Technology Consultant at VMMC, says, “VMMC’s main priority is our patients and securing email has become crucial. Two events sped up our

decision to implement a solution. First, the hospital was hit by a computer virus which generated thousands of infected messages and took half of our IT workforce eight hours to get back on track. Two weeks later, one month’s worth of email flooded in and took us 12 hours to clean up.”

As well as protection against viruses and spam, a key priority for the hospital was a solution that ensured compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). This law requires organizations to guarantee secure and efficient transaction of personal health information – along with preventing new, email-borne threats from entering their network.

*“We need to be compliant with legislation like HIPAA. Without Sophos PureMessage, we would be putting our business and our patients at risk.”*

*Michael Spohnholtz, Senior Technology Consultant, VMMC*

“HIPAA is like the Y2K compliance framework for the healthcare industry,” Spohnholtz comments. “It defines a set of standards for safely transmitting patient data. As the healthcare industry’s dependence on technology increases, we must ensure a reliable network, especially in the event of a virus outbreak. To comply with HIPAA and protect electronic medical records, organizations depend on virus-free systems. It’s an integral part of providing safe healthcare.”

## Technology solution

With patient safety at the top of the list, the team began their search. After a thorough evaluation of three solutions, the other two being appliance products, VMMC selected Sophos PureMessage.

Spohnholtz notes, “We heard about Sophos through Gartner’s 2004 Magic Quadrant, which rated them one of the top ten most viable anti-spam and anti-virus vendors in the marketplace. Our strategy was to implement a real life scenario that would help measure the effectiveness of each of the three solutions.”

To create this testing mechanism, the team installed and configured a Linux server to blind carbon copy all inbound and outbound email into a spam account. The mail was then routed through each product for unique tagging of the subject line. After three days, all subject lines were collected and analyzed.

“On average, PureMessage performed 25% better than the other products,” says Spohnholtz. “Ultimately we wanted an expert vendor with a solution that was easily configured and didn’t need to be heavily managed. PureMessage was chosen because of its superior performance on anti-spam filtering and its lower total cost of ownership. It also obtained more regular signature updates than the other two products.”



Spohnholtz continues, “VMMC wanted a solution with a low false positive rate as we needed to ensure that legitimate emails with medical terms, product names and names of drugs such as Viagra got through the filters. PureMessage’s false positive rate was, and continues to be, extremely low.” He adds, “Most importantly, PureMessage’s policy module enables us to define rules that help us meet insurance companies’ demands by facilitating compliance with HIPAA and protecting our patients’ personal information.”

## Business results

VMMC purchased PureMessage’s anti-spam, anti-virus and extended policy module to protect its users at the gateway. Following the successful implementation of PureMessage, VMMC is currently testing Sophos Anti-Virus at the desktop/server level.

“PureMessage’s out-of-the-box performance has been very good. Ensuring quick response without downtime is critical,” Spohnholtz says. “From day one, PureMessage was identifying a high rate of spam and also blocking viruses from hitting our network.”

Going a step further, Sophos is working with VMMC to ensure secure messaging using PureMessage for the hospital’s patients. Patients will be assigned a Virginia Mason email address – accessible through webmail via their home email address – that will enable them to communicate directly with their doctor.

In addition to offering secure patient webmail communication, using PureMessage’s policy functionality as part of VMMC’s infrastructure enables the team to address archiving, corporate disclaimers and content enforcement. “Deploying PureMessage directly to our patients ensures that no email will leave VMMC’s infrastructure and get into the wrong hands,” Spohnholtz concludes. “It provides our organization with clean, reliable, and safe communication.”

To find out how Sophos products can help protect your organization, visit [www.sophos.com/products](http://www.sophos.com/products), call toll-free 1-866-866-2802, or email us at [nasales@sophos.com](mailto:nasales@sophos.com).