



CAROLINA ADVANCED DIGITAL, INC.
IT INFRASTRUCTURE | SECURITY | MANAGEMENT

www.cadinc.com

800.435.2212

Blue  Coat

White Paper

Blue Coat WebFilter >

Delivering the web access your users want with the control you need

Why Dynamic Content Filtering has Become Essential

Two billion videos per day are watched on YouTube. Twenty million videos are uploaded to Facebook every month. Numbers like these make it clear that businesses of every kind need to control website access and activities that involve web content and applications. Today's users expect Internet access to any site, including YouTube video sites and social networking sites with multiple applications. This challenges organizations to ensure that best-in-class web security practices are in place. And they need to implement acceptable use policies to protect the business from legal risks, ensure employee productivity, and manage bandwidth consumption.

Content filtering plays a new and important role beyond dynamically inspecting content for malware. It is now an essential for balancing user productivity, compliance requirements and bandwidth costs – while giving users the level of web access they expect. As social networking and other interactive web communications rapidly replace email and other conventional communications, businesses need – more than ever – robust, granular ways to achieve Internet access control that satisfies policy requirements.

URL filtering is the linchpin of effective web access control, although URL-filtering databases are now largely commoditized. Blue Coat WebFilter™, with its cloud-connected architecture and inputs from a worldwide community of users, is best-in-class for web threat protection. But content filtering databases have another key role to play: control of Internet use.

What You Need to Control Web Access and Use of Content

To effectively control access to the web and the usage of web content you need several key capabilities:

Granular categorization

Granular categorization of web content is critical for elevating your URL filtering results to a new level. This is because web content is now so multidimensional that simply categorizing Facebook, and the Farmville game in Facebook, as social networking is not only ineffective but can lead to undesired consequences.

Web sites are dynamically connected to many other sites and applications that contain content that is user-driven in real time. The rise of web chatting, blogging, and email within social media applications drives the need for content-filtering solutions that accurately identify specific content – but also identify the multiple dimensions of any URL by applying more than one category. Farmville, for example, must be accurately categorized as Games as well as Social Networking.

Selective content control or delivery

With dynamic web pages now hosting a myriad of content types, IT administrators need to provide access to required content while blocking restricted content according to their acceptable internet use policy. (For example: enable access to www.wallstreet.com – but deny access to the sub-link on job hunting.)

With the prevalence of social networking, businesses need to be able to access sections of social networking sites for legitimate business activity while controlling the use of the many other attractions on these sites. Mafiawars, for example, has over seven million active users – making it clear that companies need to categorize games within Facebook, using multidimensional URL categorization, to exclude games from social network access as their use policy dictates.

Blue Coat WebFilter for Policy Control

WebFilter, powered by the WebPulse™ collaborative defense, is available both on proxy appliances and a web security SaaS. It enables businesses to protect their users and networks from web-based malware including APTs, spyware, phishing, P2P, streaming traffic, and other attacks.

WebFilter includes the following important features and characteristics, which we will describe in detail in the following sections:

- > Granular categorization engine
- > Selective content delivery
- > Rich media control
- > Comprehensive policy controls
- > Granular real time reporting of web usage

WebFilter also provides deep, dynamic categorization that can be used to implement granular policy controls for acceptable Internet use and detailed reporting on all web usage.

URL filtering database depth and scope

WebFilter, powered by WebPulse, provides over 4.5 billion ratings per week for over 75 million users worldwide, ranging from enterprises to service providers to consumers. This is the largest and most diverse user community associated with any web security vendor, and it creates the strongest user-driven web defense on the market. The enormous flow of user inputs allows WebFilter to base ratings and categories on current and relevant user activities. The WebFilter database contains millions of website ratings, covering more than 50 languages, with ratings categorized into more than 84 relevant categories.

Granular URL categorization engine

User inputs from WebFilter produce dynamic URL categorization. These real-time inputs from a diverse global user base allow Blue Coat to be aware of new content faster than any other solution. The multiple technologies that drive the WebPulse collaborative defense dynamically analyze and categorize new content, and deliver the results in real time to the user through the on-proxy-appliance database of Blue Coat ProxySG or directly via the SaaS-based Blue Coat Cloud Service – Web Security Module.

In addition, granular or multi-dimensional URL categorization is delivered by WebFilter working with ProxySG appliances or the Web Security Module. This required capability allows businesses to apply up to four category assignments to a given URL. Multi-dimensional URL categorization is pivotal to accurate web access control, given the complex nature of websites and web-based applications today.

An example of this is www.covers.com/sportsbetting, which is both a sports/recreation site and a gambling site. An accurate, granular web filter would recognize this and classify the site into both these categories, because many enterprises may allow access to sports sites, but block access to gambling sites altogether. Because WebFilter can include up to four categories per web page it reflects content much more accurately, and allows for thousands of granular sub-category combinations that make policy enforcement more flexible and powerful.

Blue Coat leverages its comprehensive URL filtering with its unique policy engine through ProxySG appliances and the Web Security Module to provide strong web security. Blue Coat's policy engine has more than 500 trigger-action combinations that enable the most granular and powerful proxy policy. By combining information from WebFilter with optimized proxy policy, Blue Coat delivers a much stronger level of web security than any competing technology.

Rich Media Control

Video access and usage in businesses today is commonplace for both personal and business use. But uncontrolled video usage can overwhelm a network and affect employee productivity. Popular sporting and media events, such as World Cup Soccer or the upcoming 2012 Olympic Games, are common engines of recreational video use. From a business perspective, podcasts are showing up in 50 different web site categories, showing that even appropriate business video content can hobble a network.

An essential benefit that Blue Coat uniquely provides is a reduction in bandwidth consumed by video through stream-splitting and multi-casting techniques that allow web-based video to be accessed once and served many times to multiple users in real time. In addition, Blue Coat's caching technology for web and video content dramatically reduces bandwidth consumption and perceptibly improves web performance.

Blue Coat provides application-aware bandwidth management capabilities to control recreational web use by combining the depth of WebFilter categorization with the strength of Blue Coat's comprehensive policy engine. For required web access control, the policy engine uses granular filtering database information to identify video content from any source and block or control that video usage based on user, category, time of day, and other usage types. As one example, throttling video content can allow online movie clips to receive limited bandwidth while CEO podcasts can be prioritized.

Conclusion

The emergence of social media as the mainstream communications environment has driven business and personal usage of many web 2.0 applications including video, email, chatting, and blogging. This creates a business imperative to allow, but control, web 2.0 applications – most significantly social media usage.

In the current complex and dynamic web environment, achieving the required control of web access starts with an accurate, dynamic and granular content filtering database. Blue Coat WebFilter content filtering, powered by WebPulse, delivers the most accurate real-time URL ratings in the industry. The multi-dimensional URL categorization supported by WebFilter works with the powerful policy engine in ProxySG appliances and the Web Security Module to deliver the most comprehensive and user relevant policy and web application controls available.

With Blue Coat's comprehensive web filtering capabilities, together with the powerful proxy engine on ProxySG appliances and in the Web Security Module SaaS, you can deliver the web access users want with the control you need.



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www.cadinc.com
800.435.2212



Blue Coat Systems, Inc. • 1.866.30.BCOAT • +1.408.220.2200 Direct
+1.408.220.2250 Fax • www.bluecoat.com

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