

## **Information Resources Council Minutes of November 3, 2004**

Attendees: Sarah Goodwin (Chair), Joe Stankovich, Brien Muller, Jeff Clark, Ruth Copans (scribe), Joanne Devine, Beth DuPont, John Sanders, Paul Dwyer, Laury Silvers, Jim Burton, Anita Miczek, Deanne Palmer, David Hamilton, Ann Henderson, Bob Jones, Mary-Beth O'Brien, Tom O'Connell, Corky Reinhart, Ray Rodrigues, Bob Royce

The minutes of October 20, 2004 were approved as submitted.

The topic of discussion was email and Jeff Clark updated us on the morning problems, which was a result of a hardware failure during routine maintenance. This could have been because of the overheating in the server room that took place some weeks ago. Jeff then distributed the following handout and reviewed the important points with IRC.

### **The Growing “SPAM” Problem**

- Spam has become the single most frequently delivered item from off-campus to on campus mailboxes. Using system logs, Spam Assassin reports, and confirming anecdotally with what I see in my own mailbox:
  - Approximately 90,000 messages a day are delivered from off campus to on campus addresses
    - Approximately 60,000 are unsolicited Spam.
    - Approximately 20,000 are “friendly” Spam from vendors I know, mailing lists I have subscribed to (Southwest Airlines, Orbitz, Alumni mailings, professional societies, etc).
    - Approximately 10,000 are directly attributable to work items.
  - On an average per person basis, assuming 1,500 active mailboxes, 60 messages a day are delivered to my mailbox.
    - 40 mail messages are unsolicited Spam.
    - 15 mail messages are “friendly” Spam.
    - 5 mail messages are attributable to work items.
- The nature of our mail system makes delivery of Spam very costly:
  - The current mail system is “file” based.
    - Delivering the mail takes many steps.
      - Lock the file.
      - Append the mail message to the end of the file (this can be very time consuming on huge mail files).
      - Unlock the file.
    - This happens over once a second for DELIVERY ONLY. The mail system also has to:
      - Send out mail.
      - Open IMAP connections for users to see mail.
      - Handle all user requests, for filing, deleting and forwarding mail.

- There is a human cost for all Spam delivered.
  - How much time do you spend deleting Spam each day?
  - The helpdesk routinely handles calls to delete messages from mailboxes.
  
- **RECOMMENDATION:**
  - Using an industry standard “appliance” filter and block Spam globally and DO NOT deliver Spam to individual mailboxes.
    - The mail server will immediately experience a dramatic improvement in performance.
    - Users will no longer have to deal with the volume of Spam they are presented with each day.
  - The Downside?
    - An extremely small percentage of legitimate mail may indeed be blocked

Several additional points about the SPAM filtering systems were made

- They are 99.78% accurate. Known SPAM will be deleted.
- The percent of legitimate mail blocked is very low.
- There is a quarantine area for questionable email.
- The current choice is Barracuda that is an industry standard with a low rejection of legitimate email.
- Individual users can set a white list (sites one wants to get email from) & black list (sites one doesn’t want to get email from).
- The filter is one for incoming mail only.

There is always a trade off. The risk is that something legitimate will be marked as SPAM. We rely on email and the assumption that if we send it, it *will* arrive, but that is an illusory feeling. In reality, delivery outside of Skidmore is not assured.

A vote was taken and IRC was unanimous in endorsing this change.

Jeff then updated us on the eventual move to Microsoft Exchange as our email client. The three servers are installed and the software loaded. He is hoping to implement it in January. The web version is widely used and it includes several other utilities, including calendar. Laury Silvers asked about negative feedback about Exchange from colleagues at other institutions. CITS folks countered that the current version is much better than the previous ones.

Laury also asked about campus Instant Messaging, especially for First Year students, as well as faculty. Bill Duffy is looking into it.

We had a brief discussion about the complexities of forwarding email and the problems students sometimes have with their Yahoo, Hotmail, or AOL accounts. Jeff asserted that this was a separate issue and he would tackle it at a later date.