

A photograph of a man in a white shirt looking intently at a computer monitor. The image is partially obscured by a blue banner on the left.

MXtreme™ Mail Firewall

MXtreme the new star in the house: Big Brother producers, Endemol, vote for email security appliance

The use of email to deliver all kinds of malware is becoming increasingly more sophisticated. With the growing threat from other sources such as malformed messages and denial of service attacks, whether random or deliberate, the days of an organisation protecting its email with just an anti-virus solution, are obsolete.



“Although we were only looking to resolve the issues cause by malformed mail, MXtreme has enabled us to improve and secure our email communication in several other areas.”

Quentin Bradley, Head of IT
Endemol UK

Endemol UK is the largest independent entertainment producer in the country, producing over 8,000 hours of programmes for British television and is behind some of the biggest international TV hits to come out of the UK. These include Big Brother (UK Versions), Fear Factor, Restoration, Fame Academy, Shattered, The Salon, The Games, Party in the Park, The BAFTAS, Fashion Rocks, Changing Rooms, Ground Force and Ready Steady Cook.

The very nature of these hugely popular, interactive programmes means that Endemol has many domain names and over 950 email user accounts to manage. During 2003, Endemol started to experience problems with its Microsoft Exchange Servers. On a regular basis the email servers would fall over for no apparent reason. Thorough investigations by Endemol’s own IT department could not shed any light into this disruptive occurrence.

MXtreme discovers problems in MS Exchange

Quentin Bradley, Head of IT, Endemol UK, decided to call in some outside help. “We contacted NetTel Services,” he explains, “an IT professional services firm that has provided Endemol with assistance before. Their engineers discovered that the cause of the problem was malformed messages entering into the email servers and performing denial of service attacks that choked the system until eventually it crashed. Although we do have anti-virus protection in place provided by a third party service, it was not picking up the messages that were causing the conflict. NetTel advised us to deploy and evaluate BorderWare Technologies’ MXtreme Mail Firewall to see if it resolved the problem.”

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Most email client software has been sufficiently enhanced over the years to accept and “correct” corrupt or badly formatted headers. The majority of the time this is a helpful operation as it ensures speedy email delivery. However, not all anti-virus scanners “see” malformed messages and therefore do not check or scan them. This makes it possible to purposefully construct a malformed message that actually contains malware and deliver it, undetected, right into the heart of the corporate office.

In addition, some malformed messages can force the CPU to run at a hundred percent, thus causing the machine to crash. Email servers process messages with the same amount of fortitude as a dog with a bone, once it’s got hold of it, it doesn’t let go. A maliciously malformed message may result in a denial of service (DoS) attack, with the affected server unable to move on until it finishes processing, which could be hours.

Quentin continues, “We took NetTel’s advice and installed MXtreme on a two week trial and haven’t looked back since. It immediately relieved the problem by checking the integrity of each message and ensuring that only correctly formatted messages were allowed into the email a server. In addition, we discovered that MXtreme provided us with other benefits as well. Our email requirements are not limited to our headquarters and a few remote users. With many temporary production locations that can be based any where in the world we require extensive email rerouting support. Since many of the productions are high profile we also require that all connections are extremely secure.”

SPAM – R.I.P.

“Spam was also starting to become a problem, some weeks we can have as many as 40,000 messages classified as spam, though the appliance took a little bit of tweaking to adapt to the type of words and language used within Endemol, we have now got the balance right and are finding this feature and the integrated anti-virus very useful. Though we do use a third party service to scan all incoming email for viruses occasionally something creeps through, but MXtreme always picks it up.”

MXtreme addresses the security issues currently preventing deployment of web mail services. It provides protection through strong authentication and encrypted sessions, and prevents information leaks on workstations. This allows users to access their mailboxes using email clients such as Outlook Web Access, iNotes, or MXtreme’s own web mail client, BorderPost. In addition, all mail delivered to and from MXtreme can be encrypted using TLS



Case Study Endemol UK

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(SSL). This includes connections to remote systems, local internal Microsoft Exchange systems, or internal mail clients.

Quentin Bradley concludes, "Although we were only looking to resolve the issues cause by malformed mail, MXtreme has enabled us to improve and secure our email communication in several other areas. It allows us to reroute email sub domains as and when we want to, rather than waiting for the work to be carried out by our ISP and everyone can access their email securely from whatever location they are at, free of spam and viruses. NetTel's recommendation of MXtreme has been invaluable."