

# California School District Counters Hackers and 'Malware' with Secure Content



## THE CHALLENGE

- ▶ Make web-accessible system as secure as possible to a broad range of stakeholders
- ▶ Continuously monitor core servers and counter attacks by sequestering the malicious code
- ▶ Implement advanced technologies and 'best practices' for secure network access

## THE SOLUTION

- ▶ Host Security Services
- ▶ Intrusion Detection Management
- ▶ Security Consulting Services

## THE RESULTS

- ▶ Secure online access on a par with financial institutions
- ▶ Foundation for secure Service-Oriented Architecture
- ▶ IT security leadership among educational institutions

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— Robert Gravina, CTO, Poway Unified School District

"We are committed to increasing access to information and student performance data through web-based applications. A key element in our strategy is to implement a secure system with ongoing monitoring functions to ensure the integrity of the system," says Dr. Don Phillips, Superintendent of Schools, Poway Unified School District. Poway USD is the third-largest school district in San Diego County, serving approximately 33,000 students in 35 schools in central San Diego County.

## Maximizing both openness and security

"A major goal we have is to make our web-accessible system as open as possible to our broader public — students, parents, teachers, administrators, staff — while ensuring their privacy and the integrity of the system itself. Providing open access through open portals requires creating effective firewalls without making them overly cumbersome, and Secure Content is enabling us to do that. The result: parents will have greater access to their child's individual information, allowing improved communication between home and school, while our teachers and staff have access to the information they most need at home or wherever they might be, to work on and prepare appropriate materials. Secure Content is allowing us to move in that direction with much greater confidence than if we were trying to do it all on our own, maximizing both the openness and security of our system."

*"We have a sophisticated system that we believe is on the cutting edge compared with most school districts. Even with our seasoned, expert IT staff, we could not do this without the assistance we are getting from Secure Content"*

— Don Phillips, Poway Unified School District, Superintendent

Secure Content provides Poway USD with protection against computer hackers and 'malware' by installing, maintaining and providing security analysis of server and network intrusion detection systems (IDS) throughout the district's schools and central data center. In addition to 24/7 network security monitoring, SecurePipe security specialists provide advice and to Poway USD in the implementation of any major IT projects. By teaming with Secure Content, Poway USD is one of the first school districts in the nation to implement a managed security solution.

## Combatting Malicious Code

Poway USD's motivation to ensure system security stems in part from painful experience. In 2004, a computer virus hit the school district's computers, forcing it to disconnect all web services for several days and leaving staff and students with no Internet access. "We recognized the need to continuously monitor our core servers



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## SUCCESS STORY— *Continued*

and to counter attacks by sequestering the malicious code and making it available for analysis by our network administrators," says Robert Gravina, Chief Technology Officer at Poway USD. "It was clear we had to know what type of traffic is actually on our networks in order to avoid a serious security breach."

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Gravina evaluated managed security offerings from a number of vendors and chose Secure Content for its proven track record in the highly exacting financial services industry. "We wanted to be able to give our stakeholders the same kind of highly secure environment they are accustomed to in their online banking, brokerage, shopping and other commercial activities on the 'net," he says. "Secure Content had the most innovative and cost-effective applications to meet our need to continuously gather information regarding suspicious activity and actual attacks on our sites."

Has the Secure Content intrusion detection capability paid off? "Absolutely. We are confident that we're detecting attempted intrusions much sooner than with previous technologies we implemented," Gravina says. "What's more, an unanticipated benefit we gained was the ability to detect spam emails, which has been invaluable in preventing illegal downloads of malicious code."

### Secure Access on a Par with Financial Institutions

An innovative IT project now underway at Poway USD that entails stringent security requirements is a network portal that gives students and parents secure access to student information, grades, homework assignments, etc. "Currently they visit a non-secure online area outside our firewall to access this information," Gravina explains. "Secure Content, with its expertise in implementing secure access for financial institutions, will show us how to implement the appropriate levels of authorization that will enable these users to tap our secure network."

This project is part of Poway USD's larger multi-year project to build a Service Oriented Architecture. "Eventually we will open up the SOA to all parents and students," Gravina says. "When this happens — over the next two to three years — we will have potentially 50,000 users."

For Poway USD, Secure Content's expertise in implementing secure access for 'single sign-on' applications is indispensable.

### Setting the Pace for IT Security in Education

Poway USD superintendent Phillips notes that the school district's security initiative is an important part of the school district's commitment to IT leadership in education. "We have a sophisticated system that we believe is on the cutting edge compared with most school districts," he says. "Even with our seasoned, expert IT staff, we could not do this without the assistance we are getting from Secure Content."



### ABOUT POWAY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

The third-largest school district in San Diego County, Poway Unified School District serves about 33,000 students in 35 schools in north San Diego County. Reflecting Poway USD's commitment to high student performance, more than 90% of its graduates continue their formal education by attending college.

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