

Case Study

Lyon County School District

PROFILE:

COUNTRY: USA
INDUSTRY: Education
SIZE: 9,000 Students

KEY REQUIREMENTS:

- A next-generation web filtering system with the ability to decrypt and filter Secure Socket Layer (SSL) traffic at very high speeds
- The ability to filter certain features or content within social media websites while allowing access to other content — and the ability for IT staff to easily block or unblock sites as necessary
- Fast, reliable customer service

MAIN BENEFITS:

- Very granular web filtering and policy control
- Future-proof flexibility to accommodate new devices and technologies
- Highly responsive technical support with same-day resolution



Lyon County School District Finds a Superior Web Filtering Solution in ContentKeeper

OBJECTIVE

Nevada's Lyon County School District was looking for a fast, reliable Internet filtering system that offered fine-tuned control over the types of content students could access. LCSD had tried four previous systems, but none of them worked as needed. With LCSD's most recent filtering system, it took IT staff too long to make changes in blocking or allowing access to certain websites, because it was such a cumbersome process — they also faced long wait times for technical support. These delays reflected poorly on the district's IT team while holding back instruction.

SOLUTION

With ContentKeeper, the district's problems have been solved. ContentKeeper's Internet filtering solution gives the IT team very granular control over students' web use. The system is highly scalable, enabling 10 Gbps throughput speeds with no latency, and has empowered IT staff to make simple changes on the fly. This has opened up a world of possibilities for teaching and learning, while also ensuring compliance with district policies. What's more, ContentKeeper's exceptional customer service has been a much-appreciated bonus.

Background

Located in the heart of silver mining country, Lyon County School District serves 9,000 students in 18 schools spread across an area almost twice the size of Rhode Island. Because the district is so rural, many students don't have high-speed Internet service at home. This makes it especially important for students to have access to technology for creating and sharing their ideas while at school, says Network Administrator Richard Cross.

LCSD students have access to laptop carts, and the district is moving forward with plans to supply a dozen Chromebooks per classroom in five schools this fall and another five schools each year thereafter.

Until now, LCSD struggled to find an Internet filtering system that would meet its needs, trying four other systems with no luck. With the district's most recent system, teachers would have to wait a few weeks before the websites they wanted students to have access to were unblocked — and that wasn't feasible for timely instruction. "We ended up having to build a list of requested websites and then spend a full day working on that list, because it took so long," Cross says.

Their filtering provider's response time to issues was not acceptable, either. "I've had tickets open with them for nine months," Cross says. "If we can't have reliable service on the back end, our hands are tied. And of course, our users hold us responsible for that."

Realizing they needed a better system, LCSD leaders began their search again. This time, they struck the mother lode with ContentKeeper, whose Internet filtering and monitoring solution provides just what the district was looking for. "We've had ContentKeeper in place for a few weeks now, and people are ecstatic," Cross says.

Greater Control

With ContentKeeper, Lyon County School District IT staff have greater control over the web content students can access. For instance, they can set policies based on specific user groups, so students at different grade levels can

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—Richard Cross
Network Administrator

be given access to different types of materials. This granularity applies to social media tools as well, letting administrators restrict access to certain kinds of content while allowing others — even within the same domain.

“We can block the personal ads alone without blocking all of Craigslist,” Cross says. “We can open up Facebook to staff now, which we couldn’t do before. We can stop them from using the chat feature, but still allow them to read posts on our district pages. We can also allow staff to have full, unrestricted access to YouTube, and for students we can turn on a Safe Search version of YouTube — basically a restricted video mode that uses the YouTube rating system to indicate whether a video is appropriate or not.”

This level of control opens up many possibilities for teaching and learning. “Teachers can override the blocking of a particular video if they need to by embedding it within our LMS, or they can show it to the entire class with an overhead projector,” Cross says. “But our students are still protected.”

The ability to block specific features within social media websites allows teachers and students to use these tools appropriately, while still enabling the district to ensure compliance with its policies.

“We require all district personnel to do business using our district systems,” Cross explains. “From inside the district, we block access to personal email accounts. While LinkedIn seems pretty harmless, it has its own email system. ContentKeeper allows us to provide access to LinkedIn for everyone but block the internal email feature. The reason is that we’re a public institution. If there’s a discovery request and we find out someone was using a personal account, that personal account would be part of the electronic discovery process. We’re protecting our staff, even if they don’t necessarily like it. But this way, we only have to release district-based emails or chat sessions — and ContentKeeper allows us to do that.”

Fast Speeds, Fast Service

Simple, granular control is just one advantage of ContentKeeper. Lyon County School District recently upgraded to a 10 Gigabit-per-second Internet connection, and the district needed a filtering solution that could support Secure Socket Layer (SSL) decryption at very high speeds. ContentKeeper’s scalable solution easily fills this need.

It’s not just ContentKeeper’s technology that is fast. “With the software’s ease of use, we’ve been able to clear tickets almost immediately when they come in with requests to block or unblock certain websites,” Cross says. “The way the system is set up, it’s really easy to look up a website and recategorize it immediately. And the company’s support is fast and responsive as well. They respond to questions in just minutes. That’s priceless to us.”

LCSD opted to have a ContentKeeper representative travel to the district to help with the installation, which only took a day. “He was pretty awesome,” Cross says. “He still checks in with me nearly every day to make sure everything is working correctly—and it’s been a few weeks.”

RESULT

In ContentKeeper, Lyon County School District has found the perfect Internet filtering solution for its needs. The solution gives district IT leaders very granular control over students’ web use. It’s highly scalable, enabling 10 Gbps Internet speeds with no delays. Administrators can easily reclassify websites in a matter of seconds. Perhaps best of all, ContentKeeper’s service and support are second to none.

Concludes Cross: “The culture of the company is probably more of an asset than the equipment itself.”