



Proactive security solution helps Noble Foods optimise supply chain and IT operations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: Noble Foods

Industry: Food Production/Agriculture/Retail

Location: United Kingdom

Company size: 1800 employees

Challenge

- Reduce spam levels without delaying legitimate email
- Promote safer web and email behavior across company

Solution

- Intelligent pre-gateway filtering solution, based on the Cisco IronPort Email and Web Security Appliances integrated with the Sawmill Enterprise 5 Reporting tool

Results

- Over 2 million threats blocked and 99.3 percent less spam in first six months
- Less risk of delays to legitimate email
- 80 percent decline in spam and virus related IT Service Desk calls, releasing IT to focus more on business enablement projects

Challenge

Noble Foods is the United Kingdom's largest egg supplier and, following the launch of its Happy Egg brand, the world's number-one free-range egg producer. With 650 users based across seven divisions, the company's operations cover the complete hen lifecycle: from breeding and rearing, selling the birds to farms and egg shelling and packing, through to the production of liquid and cooked eggs, hen disposal, and milling.

This success has been achieved largely through a sustained program of organic growth and acquisitions. For example, Noble continues to diversify into value-added fresh food categories by investing in dessert companies with attractive growth potential.

With operations spread across 42 sites throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and France, the company relies heavily on its Cisco IP network to optimize all points of its supply chain with effective communications and, in particular, an efficient email system.

"We centralized IT around four years ago and run all our operations out of a central data center using Citrix technology to deliver applications over a Cisco MultiProtocol Label Switching (MPLS) network," says Ben Gordon, IT Infrastructure Manager for Noble Foods.

With malware and spyware attacks on the rise, the company began to experience problems with excessively high levels of bogus emails. "We were receiving upward of 5000 unsolicited emails a day, which created a lot of frustration with users," says Gordon. "To make matters worse, people were also losing legitimate emails, because they contained words and images with pornographic connotations and were, therefore, being incorrectly filtered as spam."

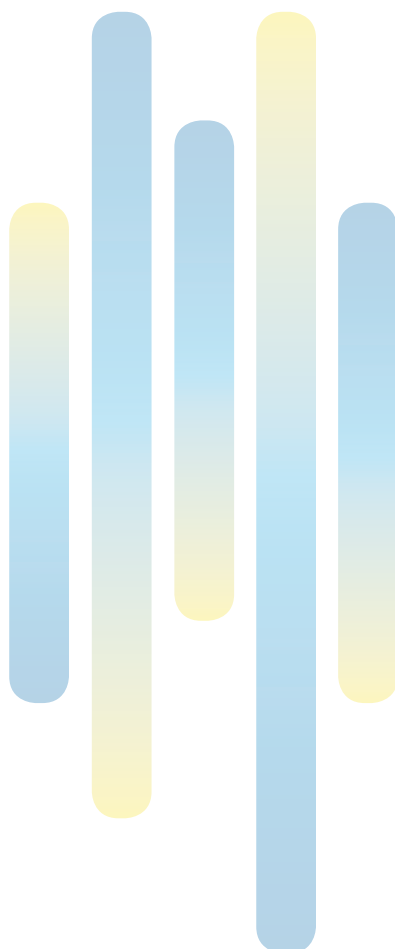
The situation was compounded by three separate antispam and web-filtering solutions. Designed to solve threats as they developed, these entry-level products had been built using various proprietary technologies and open-source software and, as a result, operated in isolation rather than working together as part of one cohesive, enterprise wide security system.

"Often we could spend the whole day dealing with spam issues, which for a small IT team serving 650 users was not sustainable," says Gordon.



“We needed an intelligent pre-gateway filtering solution that would make it easier to enforce policies and to protect users, without being overzealous and bringing the business to a grinding halt.”

Ben Gordon
IT Infrastructure Manager
Noble Foods



Solution

The company's response was to move from a reactive approach that focused solely on containing threats once they had passed through the firewall, to a proactive one that assessed and removed risks, in real-time before they could penetrate the network perimeter.

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After extensively researching the market, Noble Foods formed a shortlist headed by Cisco IronPort™ solutions. “IronPort's reputation, plus the fact that they were now part of Cisco, effectively offered two market leaders for the price of one,” says Gordon. “Even so, we were still looking for candid advice rather than just a sales team simply looking to close a deal.”

Cisco Security assembled a team of network, email, and web security experts, who worked closely with Noble's IT team to identify potential vulnerabilities and scope requirements, before helping to plan, design, and implement the new platform.

This advanced security solution, comprising Cisco® IronPort Email Security and Web Security Appliances, allows the company to benefit from the latest advances in threat detection and prevention. These innovations include:

- Dynamic Vectoring and Streaming engine: a revolutionary scanning tool for signature-based spyware and malware filtering
- Cisco Security Intelligence Operations (SIO): a combination of threat telemetry, a team of global research engineers, and sophisticated security modeling. SIO also includes SenderBase: a threat-tracking database that captures Internet traffic patterns and data from over 100,000 organizations worldwide
- Pre-eXecution Environment (PXE) technology: industry-leading email encryption for helping ensure secure messaging compliance and regulatory requirements.

As the project progressed, its focus widened when Noble's HR department saw an opportunity to improve monitoring and governance of web usage across the company.

Taking these new requirements, Cisco Security was able to integrate the Sawmill Enterprise 5 Reporting tool with the new security platform. As well as providing the ability to restrict inappropriate emails and visits to specific websites, the solution empowers HR to set up their own automated reports, drill down, and take appropriate corrective action.

“For such a high-profile project, the migration was remarkably smooth and largely invisible to end users,” says Gordon. “Best of all, because the Cisco Security solutions are simple ‘plug and play,’ they required minimal configuration and maintenance.”

Results

Implementing the Cisco Security solutions has enabled Noble Foods to strengthen its web and email defences in a number of ways.

Suspicious traffic and potential threats are now automatically intercepted in the cloud before they can reach the desktop. This proactive approach is supported by the SIO, which receives over 30 billion queries daily and increases malware catch rates by more than 20 percent over signature-based scanning-only products. In the first six months, Noble isolated over 2 million malicious threats and cut spam levels by 99.3 percent.

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Employees are more aware of their responsibilities for safe Internet use. IT security policy has been underpinned by the ability to easily and rapidly block websites frequently targeted by malware and spyware producers. “The Cisco IronPort solution gives us much greater control,” says Gordon. “For example, remote workers at a production site can use PCs located in the Internet cafe during their breaks. The system will let them visit certain social networking sites during specific hours, but prevents the use of bandwidth-hungry video flash games, thereby protecting the 6Mbps network link.”

There is now less risk of legitimate email that could contain customer orders, breeder data, agreements, or documentation ending up in quarantine.

“We’ve seen a 75 percent reduction in false positives, which are instances when the scanner incorrectly thinks it has found a specific vulnerability,” says Gordon. “In layman’s terms, this means more ‘good’ email is getting through the system, which means our supply chain can function more effectively and efficiently. If there are any problems, our system even flags these to our users who are empowered to release certain types of mail themselves.”

The project has also been good news for Noble’s IT team. “Calls to our IT Service Desk have dropped by 80 percent,” says Gordon. “Overall, we hardly spend anytime fire-fighting security problems, which means we can concentrate on planning and delivering projects that will add increased value to the business.”

Next Steps

Noble Foods is already looking to enhance operations and simplify IT further still. As part of a phased approach, the company plans to replace aging private branch exchange (PBX) systems with Cisco IP Telephony, initially at its larger sites. The project is expected to improve collaboration and productivity, while saving money on calls and maintenance.

PRODUCT LIST

Security and VPN

- Cisco IronPort C160 Email Security Appliance
- Cisco IronPort S160 Web Security Appliance
- Web, email, and image analysis licensing

Services

- Cisco Security Consultancy
- Integration with Sawmill Enterprise 5 Reporting tool



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