

Spector 360 Minimizes Ill Winds at Plainfield Community School District



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Industry: Education
Location: Plainfield, Illinois
Students/Teachers: ≈ 30,000

Plainfield Community School District 202 is a 64-square-mile public school district in Illinois, located approximately 35 miles southwest of Chicago.

The School District encompasses 30 buildings, a student population of approximately 28,000, more than 3,100 employees, and a computer network of approximately 5,500 PCs running Windows XP. Ten Windows servers and 40 Novell servers drive the network.

For more information about Plainfield Community Consolidated School District 202, please visit: learningcommunity202.org.

The Plainfield Community School District was challenged to minimize or eliminate Internet-based game-playing, web-surfing, and identity theft.

The Challenge

Based on the weather outside as well as some of the events inside the School District's walls, it might be said that there have been ill winds in Plainfield that have blown nobody any good.

With the advent of the Internet in schools came what Network Administrator Russell Moore calls "curriculum-based research." And with that PC activity came game-playing, web-surfing, identity theft, and the entire range of frivolous and inappropriate behavior.

"We've always caught students doing things they shouldn't be doing," said Moore. "But with changes in technology, we saw we had a driving need for monitoring.

"Even before we knew what students were doing on school computers, the administration and parents assumed we knew. Sure, we could get some information, but not much and not easily. We had to pore over Windows logs ... it was tedious, long and drawn out. Even then we did not have a high level of certainty ... no confidence of collecting ALL the data ALL the time."

Search for a Solution

The first attempt at controlling troubles spawned by Internet access was use of a firewall, effectively putting the School District in compliance with the tenets of the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA). Moore minimized this advance, however, saying "CIPA is mostly about filtering. Even without trying to satisfy CIPA, we'd be blocking websites anyway. Nobody wants grade school students finding adult materials. Trying to use a firewall as a complete solution was awful, almost impossible. We absolutely needed a better way."

Moore said the School District's only monitoring experience came through use of a minimally helpful Novell feature Moore described as "real-time watching," and a utility developed by the School District called "Control Freak." The latter was used mostly in PC labs and media centers, offering little more than turning PCs on and off from a central location.

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Russell Moore
Network Administrator
Plainfield Community School District

“Key points in our search? Price was a big one because monitoring was an unfunded project,” said Moore. “Ease of use was on the list, but not as high for us because we had adequate technical resources to work with more challenging programs.

Data capture was key.”

Moore said he found SpectorSoft “at the top of a Google search.”

“The search turned up about four other products,” said Moore. “A couple of the products seemed similar to SpectorSoft’s, and we evaluated one of them for 30 days. It was better than what we had been doing on our own, but primitive compared to Spector 360. It was a great leap from where we were, but if so, then Spector 360 is TWO GREAT LEAPS from where we were.”

Discoveries

Using Spector 360’s high-level Dashboard view, Moore noticed dramatic underuse of an application believed to be important to the School District’s curriculum.

“We had spent a lot of money on a particular software program ... and with Spector 360 we found that compared to 32,000 hours of activity logged by some applications in a month, it was being used about 16 hours,” said Moore.

“Spector 360 showed us we can cut back on licensing and save about \$175,000 every four years ... the timeframe of our PC upgrade cycle. Spector 360 pays for itself many times over right there, and that’s just one piece of software ... we have other programs to evaluate. Spector 360 will clearly show us what programs students use, and where resources might be better allocated.”

In addition to the cost-savings uncovered by Spector 360’s high-level view, Moore said Spector 360 helped him discover a potential violation of the School District’s acceptable use policy.

“We found two students trying to download keyloggers ... trying to capture passwords to gain access to teacher and student accounts ... apparently intending to damage or destroy files,” said Moore.

“Spector 360 showed us that USB drives were used, who used them, plus the actual USB drives used, including the device ID. That was fantastic ... we were able to verify the actual device. The students handed over the USB drives, and using Spector 360 we were able to capture the passwords needed to open the drives.”

“I have more than 100 inappropriate actions documented using Spector 360,” said Moore.

Awareness

Despite misbehavior being at an all-time low, “students are written up every couple of days.”

“Students know they’re not supposed to go there, but they do it anyway,” said Moore. “If one student finds one thing and isn’t caught, pretty soon there will be two ... then 50.”

Working with Students/Employees

Moore said the School District has an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP), and signing by parents is required at student enrollment, then again at promotion from one education level to another.

“Our AUP is mandated by the School Board and as such is effectively a law,” said Moore. “The AUP’s two key points state that PCs at school are to be used for school purposes only, and that there is no expectation of privacy.”

School District policy does not allow teachers to be monitored, even when using a monitored PC. Spector 360’s advanced technology makes this seemingly daunting task easy.

“Spector 360 allows us to easily exclude teachers,” said Moore. “All I have to do is tell Spector 360 ‘do not include.’ I’m amazed how well it does it ... you’re talking about telling Spector 360 to look at MILLIONS of records and adding by the way, don’t include these 3,500!”

Spector 360: The Software of Choice

“Many Spector 360 features are powerful and helpful, but we were really interested in the granular details,” said Moore. “Reporting used to be PC-based, but our real need is user-centric. The key interest for us is not what happened on the PC, but was it Johnny that did it? We needed a strong link between the person’s identity and the activity. Spector 360 gave that to us.

“The Spector 360 Dashboard sums up everything, it’s amazingly useful, giving us a user-centric view of the world. Spector 360 is almost like two products ... the high-level view of the entire environment and the super-deep, granular inspection.”

Moore added that he finds the granular data obtained using Spector 360’s Data Explorer and User Explorer features especially helpful “when the Dean calls.”

“Data Explorer and User Explorer are the bread and butter ... the keys to detailing inappropriate activity. They’re what I use for real detail, day in and day out,” said Moore.

“One of Spector 360’s features I especially appreciate and use all the time is the Keyword Alerts,” said Moore. “There’s a ton of background noise, but the Keyword Alerts lift out the information from the noise.

“It’s interesting to note that not every Keyword Alert represents inappropriate activity, but it is almost impossible to have inappropriate activity occur and not make the Keyword Alert list.”

Spector 360 contains more than 50 “out of the box” reports, yet customization of those reports – as well as preparation of reports unique to an organization or investigative situation -- is a Spector 360 feature Moore finds helpful.

“The ready-to-use reports work well for me,” said Moore. “But I do make custom reports on occasion, usually to focus in on data we’ve obtained with one of the prepared reports.”

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“Spector 360’s Search feature has been very helpful in sifting through all the data,” said Moore. “The students have been on a hunt for remote proxies ... using the Search feature and entering that term, we’ve found some kids searching for remote proxies all day long. The first thing they do when they find one is go to MySpace.”

“Spector 360’s ability to save time is a big plus, making local work out of long distance,” said Moore. “Our buildings are miles apart. When you add in the travel factor, in the past it might have taken hours to gather data and compile a report. Now, thanks to Spector 360, it’s just a few minutes.”

Moore said he had a “great experience” with the SpectorSoft sales team.

“Our SpectorSoft sales contact went out of his way to ensure our success,” said Moore. “Plus, we were not well funded, and SpectorSoft worked with us to make it happen.”

Moore said the Spector 360 installation process was a snap.

“It was one of those 1-click installs,” said Moore. “You start it with a click and then click Next, Next, Next, and so on. I think it’s wise for an administrator to take the time for appropriate planning ... that’s necessary for any network activity ... but after that the Spector 360 install was very straightforward.”

“Time to learn Spector 360? Minimal,” said Moore. “Upkeep? Pretty low ... it basically takes care of itself.”

Moore said his few experiences with SpectorSoft Tech Support have been exceptional.

“The dealings I have had with Tech Support were fantastic,” said Moore. “Email response has been within MINUTES, and topnotch.”

Moore said Spector 360’s ability to QUANTIFY student misbehaviors is perhaps its most obvious contribution.

“Spector 360’s findings are one thing, valuable in their own right,” said Moore. “But the TIME being spent doing certain things, that’s key ... huge for parents and administration.

“With Spector 360, you don’t just get a report that 17 web pages were visited, you get to see the TIME spent there. It reveals time wasted ... that’s a huge deal. It raises the urgency, putting it in terms that can be understood by all. A parent may not have a problem with their child going to MySpace, but if 17 hours a week is being spent there, that’s different ... THAT would get their attention!”

“We had SOME order before we began using Spector 360 ... we have MORE now,” said Moore. “It was not a free-for-all before Spector 360, but we have enhanced our ability to keep things in order. Around the year 2000 it WAS a free-for-all, so we got the firewall.

“Then we added another layer ... Spector 360 ... and that was the most important. Spector 360 greatly enhanced our ability to keep students from doing what they’re not supposed to do. Spector 360 does a great job of picking up where the firewall leaves off.”

About Spector 360®

Spector 360 enables you to monitor employee PC and Internet use, analyze trends and patterns, search for specific details, investigate when something seems amiss, and report your findings all from the convenience of your desktop. Spector 360 is a highly scalable, centrally-managed, employee monitoring solution that is easy to deploy and manage, even company-wide.

Features at a Glance

- Monitor all employee PC and Internet activity with high-level charts, graphs and tables
- View detailed activity of individual employees with point-and-click drill down
- Automated reporting
- Includes context-based web filtering
- Multiple levels of security prevent tampering or disabling
- Configure, install and manage over existing network



Spector 360
June 17, 2008

"Top-notch reporting and monitoring"

"Highly configurable and scalable"

"Well-designed client server architecture"

-PC Magazine

"On just one event -- Spector 360 giving us insight into that one piece of software not being well-used -- Spector 360 will pay for itself," said Moore. "Spector 360 is worth the price just for the high-level view. Then there's the detailed reporting ... that's priceless."

"I love working with the SpectorSoft people," said Moore. "The end-to-end process has been extremely positive ... way more so than any product or company I've ever worked with. SpectorSoft management seems to foster an attitude of cooperation."

"Overall, Spector 360 is a great product. I would definitely buy it again," said Moore. "If we were not monitoring with Spector 360, the consequences would be catastrophic."



SpectorSoft offers PC and Internet monitoring and surveillance solutions for education, business, government and home users.

To learn more, and see how Spector 360 monitoring software can help solve your Internet abuse and productivity issues, please visit spector360.com.

Learn more about SpectorSoft monitoring and surveillance solutions for business at spectorsoft.com

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