

Spector 360 Keeps Misbehavior Down Under at Lowanna College



Lowanna College

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Industry: Education
Location: Victoria, Australia
Students/Teachers: ≈ 1200

Lowanna College is a grade 7-12 high school in Victoria, Australia with approximately 1,200 students. The public institution is considered a leader in the use of Information Communications Technology (ICT) in Australian schools.

Lowanna College has approximately 260 PCs on its network, all with high-speed Internet access running Windows XP. Fourteen Windows 2003 servers drive the network.

For more information about Lowanna College, please visit: lowanna.vic.edu.au.

Lowanna College was challenged to protect students from the Internet's dark side, and also to defend teachers and administration against liability as they went about their "duty of care."

The Challenge

ICT/Multimedia Manager Greg Gebhart has considered "duty of care" to be a key school system concern since his introduction to technology and education.

"I've long been interested in how youth put themselves and others at risk through use of the Internet," said Gebhart. "Internet Safety has become a major issue for schools worldwide. Cyberbullying is growing, identity theft is becoming commonplace, and the use of Web 2.0 tools allows many students to place inappropriate content on the Internet."

"Running high level filtering systems once handled many of the issues, but rapid growth in proxy bypass and proxy anonymizers, plus the resourcefulness of students to work around school networks, has become a major problem."

In addition to protecting students, Gebhart has a broader concern.

"Who is liable if an incident occurs involving students using school computer resources?" Gebhart asked. "Is it the Classroom Teacher, the ICT Manager, the Principal, or Head of the School Board?"

Gebhart believes schools should be looking at methods to cover this uncertainty.

"I am committed to protect myself and other educators," said Gebhart. "Beyond student safety, that is one of the core concerns ... how do we keep from putting teachers at risk?"

Search for a Solution

Gebhart said Lowanna College, as well as more than half the schools in Australia at one time in the not too distant past, used an Internet management program designed to provide some semblance of adherence to "duty of care" principles.

"One of the items the program provided was a text-based list of accessed web sites," said Gebhart. "Both compilation and review was time-consuming ... it was not an effective measure."

Working with his ICT support group, Gebhart investigated different options of monitoring and detecting inappropriate use of the school's computer network, including using white lists to allow only pre-approved web sites to be accessed,

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ICT Manager
Lowanna College, Australia

download limits, and real-time monitoring of student use. After trying and rejecting them all, the school happened upon Spector 360.

“We learned of SpectorSoft by word of mouth at an education forum,” said Gebhart. “We heard a 5-user trial of Spector 360 was available, and we contacted SpectorSoft to take advantage of the opportunity. With the information we found during the fully functional evaluation — a pre-sales aspect we really appreciated — **we felt Spector 360 was essential**, and we squeezed the budget to make the purchase.”

Discoveries

Gebhart said the first full day using Spector 360 provided an “amazing look” into what students were doing on school computers and the Internet. The monitoring software was installed on 200 computers and about a fifth of the school population had PC access on the first day of its use.

Despite thinking the school had a secure network with high level filtering as well as policies and procedures in place to ensure staff had students “appropriately engaged” on computers, Gebhart said “we still observed many surprising issues.”

Gebhart added many of the school’s staff were shocked to see what was happening but Gebhart said he believes the activities at Lowanna College are indicative of many high schools in Australia and around the world.

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According to Gebhart, Spector 360’s early findings included:

- » Approximately 30 percent of the school’s students were playing games
- » Two students had staff passwords and used them to gain unrestricted access to parts of the Internet
- » Many students used bypass proxy web sites to access MSN Messenger or configure remote desktops
- » Two students brought a significant amount of pornography into the school on USB drives
- » A number of students found and accessed pornography web sites unblocked by the Department of Education’s filter list
- » One student was accessing a vampire chat site, indicating love for an unknown male overseas and expressing her desperate desire to obtain a web cam and microphone so she could chat about relocating to the “friend’s” hometown. The scenario indicated possible pedophilia.
- » Several students were using a chat site to discuss suicide
- » Junior students were regularly using Google to search for keywords such as sex and porn

“Another thing we noticed was how much downtime there was in class,” said Gebhart. “Productivity was 50 percent or less. Spector 360 showed us the amount of applications being used was minimal. Three-quarters of the class were on the Internet ... we could see it in detail ... the games and all the rest.”

Following the first month of Spector 360 implementation, considerable changes occurred. Many teachers reported that students were finishing their allocated classwork on computers well ahead of time, requiring the teachers to prepare additional tasks. Gebhart said teachers felt the change was attributable to Spector 360.

“With Spector 360 in place, students who secretly had been surfing the web for non-educational content had been issued a misuse notice,” said Gebhart. “Consequentially, in future classes, these students changed their focus to be fully dedicated to class-related tasks.”

Spector 360 has enabled school technicians to verify student responsibility for inappropriate downloads or large printing jobs, despite claims that “others” were using their account.

In two cases, Spector 360’s screen snapshots have been used as evidence for law enforcement in cases of cyberbullying and the selling of illegal goods on eBay.

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Awareness

Within a month of Spector 360’s installation, more than 50 percent of the student population had been issued a misuse notice. The number of notices has dropped to about four to five a week ... a dramatic decrease from approximately 150 a week during the first month.

Working with Students/Employees

When logging on to the school’s computer system, students receive notification that all their actions will be monitored and that inappropriate use of the computer system will result in their removal from the network.

The logon notice also details penalties for inappropriate use, such as first offense: computer and Internet access removed for one week, and second offense: removal for four weeks. Students are required to accept these terms before they can finish logging on to the network.

Gebhart said the school does not monitor teachers unless they are using network PCs, a rare occasion because all teachers are provided with notebook computers.

“Especially when you consider the geographic separation, our dealings with SpectorSoft have been exceptional ... we don’t always have that experience.”

Support for everything has been seamless.”

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Lowanna College, Australia

Spector 360: The Software of Choice

“Spector 360 has made a positive impact on student computer usage at Lowanna College,” said Gebhart. “The ability to easily monitor, report, and follow up on misuse of the Internet has changed student practices and improved teaching and learning.

“The investment in Spector 360 has made a significant difference in our technology usage, and teaching and learning outcomes involving the use of technology, as well as covering the school in its duty of care responsibilities related to student use of the Internet.”

Spector 360 clearly has changed the tune of students when confronted with charges of misbehavior.

“It used to be that students would say ‘it wasn’t me ... it was someone else,’” said Gebhart. “Now they readily admit they did the wrong thing. They know they can’t deny it because they’re familiar with the evidence Spector 360 provides us ... word of mouth among the students is very powerful.

Gebhart said Spector 360 has helped the school determine how to best use PC resources.

“There was some debate as to whether PCs should be shifted out of the computer labs and into the classrooms,” said Gebhart. “Using Spector 360 we monitored usage in the labs versus the classrooms and found the lab configuration provides for maximum effectiveness.”

School computer technicians use Spector 360 to identify popular non-education sites visited by students, and to spot trends in computer use, both of which are valuable in adding inappropriate web sites to the school’s blocked filter list.

Lowanna College has set Spector 360 to take screen snapshots every two seconds, allowing the school to fully observe inappropriate or questionable computer use by students. The two-second timing allows the school to store 30 days of data, valuable in following up cyberbullying incidents at later dates.

Through the use of Spector 360’s Keyword Alerts feature as well as monitoring of chat conversations and social networking sites, Spector 360 has been helpful in identifying students who are at risk of self-harm and emotional breakdown. Gebhart said this has been even more important to the school in light of two recent youth suicides in Australia.

While Spector 360’s Dashboard provides Gebhart and Lowanna College with an unprecedented high-level view of student PC activity, the ability to drill down to granular detail also is highly regarded.

“Recently, using the high-level view, we were able to note some inappropriate eBay activity,” said Gebhart. “Drilling down we were able to get to the actual transaction ... very nice detail ... a very nice feature.”

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

Gebhart said the Spector 360 installation was handled by the school's Network Administrator and went without a hitch.

"Spector 360 was downloaded and up and running in one day," said Gebhart. "Time to learn ... not too much. The biggest challenge with Spector 360 is a good one ... the program offers so many features! We probably use the most common 15 to 20 ... but it's reassuring to know you have them all ... that the others are available."

"Things were not out of control, but we were leaving ourselves open to risk in the medium- to long-term," said Gebhart. "Using Spector 360 and eliminating the risk ... stopping it before it happens ... we'll save some careers."

"At the outset of our relationship with SpectorSoft, I had some concerns about the distance between us, but they were unfounded," said Gebhart. "Both Sales and Tech Support have been fantastic. Our Sales contact stayed late to be able to work with our business manager during the ordering process, and Tech Support responds right away. If we have a question, we send it across when we leave at night and we have a response the next day when we come in.

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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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