



George Wimpey plc

After two particularly nasty spamming attacks in quick succession during the spring of 2002, the George Wimpey IT team advised their board that it was time to take the most stringent action. As a longstanding customer of our anti-virus service, the company was well aware that MessageLabs faultlessly delivers completely virus-free email. When they learned that MessageLabs could also scan heuristically for spam, the choice was easy to make. Since that time the spammers have been forced to take their 'business' elsewhere.

George Wimpey is Britain's leading housebuilder. The group builds more than 17,000 new homes a year in the UK and the US, with an employment roll of 4,500 people.

After a period of unprecedented growth through acquisition and asset swapping, the business was restructured in the early summer of 2002. George Wimpey has since grown further, with the purchase of Laing Homes in November 2002, and now has 30 business units and five corporate centres based in regionally organised locations.

With around 1,100 email addresses currently on its system, George Wimpey's complete IT delivery is outsourced to a major service provider. The group itself now retains only three IT personnel: a business systems manager, an IT director and Peter Franklin, Service Delivery Manager.

'They were using us as their spam engine'

It was Peter who told us of George Wimpey plc's uncomfortable brush with the spamming menace. 'We don't know why they picked on us,' says Peter, 'but a spamming operation somewhere just started sending millions of spam emails out — all of which appeared to be coming from George Wimpey. It was a bad experience.'

'Effectively they were using us as their spam engine. Of course we were immediately being blacklisted by ISPs. Even though

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Peter Franklin
IT Service Delivery Manager, George Wimpey plc

we were able to shut down our external email system relatively quickly, the spam attack crashed our mail network because it was generating such enormous quantities of data.

'We managed to disinfect our servers and get rid of the rubbish. But we'd had our system back in business for less than a week when exactly the same thing happened again. It was a nightmare. Again we had to shut down and clean, and we knew we couldn't go on like that.'

The search for a solution didn't take long. As MessageLabs's construction engineering specialist Duncan Paul explains: 'George Wimpey had already been a customer of our anti-virus service for a couple of years. When we demonstrated how we could put similar heuristical scanning techniques to work on identifying and spotting spam at the Internet level, they were quick to see the point.'

George Wimpey plc signed up for the anti-spam service almost immediately. It was a quick and easy decision to make, says Peter Franklin. The whole senior workforce knew only too well how badly the earlier spam attacks had affected us, including the board of course, so it was simple to make the business case for investment in the MessageLabs service.'

Totally satisfied with the anti-virus and anti-spam services

Since that time, in June 2002, George Wimpey has had absolutely no recurrence of the problem — not that Peter is at all surprised by the result: 'We learned a long time ago that MessageLabs really do what they say they'll do. They've kept our email completely virus-free, as promised, ever since we signed up for the anti-virus service in 2000. And now they've solved the spam problem with similar success.'

'The great thing about MessageLabs is that you know you can rely on them. We continue to be totally satisfied with both the anti-virus and anti-spam services — and it's my view that they would be cheap at double the price. Not only do you get peace of mind in knowing that you're protected from email hazards; you can also look at the results and say quite confidently: well, that's a good investment.'

The decision to buy the MessageLabs anti-virus service was taken back in the summer of 2000, before Peter had moved into his current job. Nevertheless, he remembers the event well: 'We had anti-virus software running on all our pcs and laptops, but it was a growing problem to keep up-to-date with new signatures being released by the vendors.'

A major aggravation to have servers out of action

'Every time there was a serious virus alert, we'd have to shut down our external email until we were sure we had a fix for the particular new infection. Though we can go on building houses if the system goes down, it's a major aggravation to our general business efficiency to have servers out of action — especially for things like payroll and paying suppliers.'

'Our security policy worked well enough in terms of saving us from the effects of virus strikes, but it was all so cumbersome. We were certainly aware that we were only semi-protected.'

'So we knew that something had to be done to find a less labour-intensive way of stopping viruses. Many people across the business were aware of the virus problem, so the proposal to buy the MessageLabs service was easy to support.'

Like pretty well every organisation today, George Wimpey has very quickly come to rely on email as a primary medium of communication. As Peter says: 'Anything that can disrupt your email is a threat to the business these days. If you put the relatively small cost of the MessageLabs service into context with what it would cost you to achieve such a level of protection by traditional AV means — or the cost of a serious virus strike — the choice is really a no-brainer.'

Peter finds that having MessageLabs in place to cover the threats of viruses and spam email also frees him up to take a wider view of George Wimpey plc's IT service delivery needs. 'Our policy of outsourcing IT is founded on the expectation that we can leave the day-to-day running of our systems to experts in their fields,' he says. 'With the MessageLabs anti-spam and anti-virus services we know we have the best — and that we can continue to expect the best.'