

BlueCat Brings Simplicity, Security, and Scalability to University of Mary Washington

OVERVIEW

The University of Mary Washington (formerly Mary Washington College) is a coeducational, state-funded, four-year liberal arts university in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Founded in 1908 as the State Normal and Industrial School for Women, the college was renamed Mary Washington College in 1938 after Mary Ball Washington, mother of George Washington: first president of the USA. In 2004, the institution legally became the University of Mary Washington, where supportive faculty and more than \$180,000 in annual student research funds make for one of the most ambitious undergraduate research programs in the nation. Home to over 5000 students and 200 professors, the University of Mary Washington is committed to being a premier public institution of higher education; cultivating an environment of academic excellence, fostering lifelong learning, and providing service to its constituent communities.



“ Even the smallest mistake in DNS configurations could be disastrous. ”

Joe Haynes
Director of Infrastructure Service at
Mary Washington



OPPORTUNITY

Joe Haynes, Director of Infrastructure Services at Mary Washington, had experienced wide-scale system failure at the hands of human error one too many times. Running Linux and UNIX, network administrators regularly wrote code and entered complex DNS configurations manually. Though his staff was certainly proficient at their respective tasks, Haynes found that even the “smallest mistake in DNS configurations could be disastrous”, causing hours of downtime while administrators tried to track down the source of the error and then work to correct it. Moreover, the university’s in-house DNS and DHCP had proven to be vulnerable to hackers and malicious denial of service attacks. With hundreds of laptops and PDA’s already on its student/faculty network, Mary Washington was also looking at moving towards adopting Voice Over IP applications, but would require safe and reliable DHCP at its core before it could move forward.

From Haynes’ perspective, the university’s needs were therefore threefold: 1) provide network administrators with a buffer that “wouldn’t allow them to kill the entire system by making a simple mistake”, 2) secure the internal and external DNS without frequent patches or updates to the operating system or hardware, and 3) prepare the network for IP telephony. In short, University of Mary Washington needed a scalable solution that provided better tools to help his team manage their network safely and securely.



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CASE STUDY EDUCATION

SOLUTION

Haynes began researching providers of integrated appliance-based DNS and DHCP solutions, so as to eliminate the need to maintain an operating system and DNS/DHCP servers separately. The Adonis Family of Appliances from BlueCat Networks proved to be the ideal fit for University of Mary Washington. With a user-friendly GUI and advanced error-checking capabilities, the Adonis 1000 DNS/DHCP Appliance's Management Console empowered administrators to perform multiple "undo/redo" edits and changes. Eliminating manual data re-entry by using the same copy/cut/paste capabilities offered by popular office productivity software drastically reduced potential problems caused by human error. Different DNS configurations could also be tested without jeopardizing or potentially losing data. This ability to test and verify configuration changes prior to deployment ensured that any errors were corrected early, and not proliferated throughout the network. What's more, the Adonis 1000's MAC Authentication protocols with Network Access Control for DHCP would help the University to enforce greater control of who was granted access to their network using any wireless devices.

IMPACT

BlueCat has brought "considerable change" to IT departments at Mary Washington. Previously, Haynes and his team had found network administration to be "a lot of effort for something that shouldn't be so difficult". With the Adonis Family of Appliances at work, network administration became virtually trouble-free, and has remained that way at Mary Washington for the past three years. Whereas the university used to need to employ specialists in Linux and UNIX in order to maintain their network, they can now assign DNS updates to entry-level personnel. As a result, Haynes reports being able to use his "best people's best talents on bigger projects", rather than have them bogged down on security updates or the mundane minutia of DNS and DHCP configurations.

Haynes also cited a better product roadmap and customer support as reasons for purchasing from BlueCat over their competitor(s). He remarked that "BlueCat's support team was very responsive when we were evaluating the products, and post-purchase support never dropped. They remained very involved and interested, and listened to our needs". Ultimately, the university received key customizations for their Adonis appliances that solidified and unified the entire network, providing Mary Washington with an extremely secure foundation - ready for technological expansion and evolution in accordance with the institution's vision.



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