

GFI White Paper

Web monitoring for employee productivity enhancement

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Employees both want and do not want to have their Internet use restricted. The key to success in gaining productivity and employee acceptance of the problem is the perception of fairness, clear goals and self-enforcement.

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Why employees don't want Internet blocking.....	3
Why employers are afraid of Internet blocking.....	3
Why employees want Internet controls.....	3
How employers can gain employee support for web monitoring.....	4
Conclusion.....	4
About GFI®	4

Introduction

All too often when web monitoring and Internet use restrictions are put into place it hurts company morale and does little to enhance employee productivity. Not wanting to create friction in the work place many employers shy away from using what could be a significant employee productivity enhancement tool. Wasting time through Internet activities is simple and it's a huge hidden cost to business. Just answering a few personal emails, checking the sports scores, reading the news headlines and checking to see how your bid is holding up can easily waste an hour of time each day. If the company has an eight-person department and each of them spends an hour a day on the above activities, that is a whole employee wasted!

Why employees don't want Internet blocking

- » They don't know what is blocked and what is allowed. This uncertainty creates fear that they may do "something" that could hurt their advancement opportunities or worse jeopardize their job.
- » Someone ruined it for everyone and that person still works here. When everyone is punished, no one is happy. Resentment builds against the employee known to have visited inappropriate websites.
- » There is no procedure in place for allowing an employee access to a blocked website. When an employee finds that a website they tried to access is blocked, what do they do? Certainly this indiscretion is going to show up on a report somewhere. What if they really need that site? Is there a procedure in place for allowing this person to access it?

Uncertainty is fodder for loss of morale. In today's economic climate, employees are especially sensitive to any action that can be perceived as clamping down on them. Therefore a web monitoring program must be developed that can be viewed in a positive light by all employees.

Why employers are afraid of Internet blocking

- » The potential of adding to IT costs and human resources headaches takes away the value from web monitoring. The Internet is a big place and employees are smart. Employers don't want to get into a situation where they are simply chasing their tail, trading one productivity loss by incurred costs and frustration elsewhere.
- » Employers want to allow employee freedom. There is general recognition by employers that a happy employee is a loyal productive employee. Allowing certain freedoms creates a more satisfying work environment. The impact of taking that away may cause good employees to leave and an increase in turn over can be costly.

The fear of trading one cost for another or trading one headache for another has prevented many employers from implementing internet monitoring and blocking. A mistrust of IT services may also come into play. Technology got us into this situation, where up to 20% of employee time is spent on the Internet; many employers don't trust that technology can also help them gain that productivity back. A monitoring program needs to be simple to implement and maintain.

Why employees want Internet controls

- » Employees are very aware of what their co-workers are doing or not doing. If an employee in the office spends an hour every day monitoring their auctions on ebay, or reading personal email or chatting on IM every other employee in the office knows it and resents it. If they are working hard, everyone else should be too.
- » Unfortunately pornographic and other offensive material finds its way into the office when the Internet is unrestricted. Exposure to this material puts the employee in a difficult situation. Do they tell the boss? Do they try to ignore it? Do they talk to the employee themselves? The employee would rather not be put into this situation.
- » Employees want to work for successful, growing companies. Solid corporate policies that are seen as a necessary means to continue to propel the company forward add to employee satisfaction. Web monitoring can be one of those policies.

How employers can gain employee support for web monitoring

- » Provide a clear, fair policy statement and expose the reasoning and goals. Keep it simple. Employees won't read a long policy position paper. Stick to the facts and use positive language.
 - Policies that make sense to staff are easy to enforce
 - Policies with goals are easy to measure
 - When the goal has been reached, celebrate with your employees in a big way. Everyone likes to feel like part of the team.
- » Empower your employees. Let each employee actively participate in deciding which sites are allowed and which are not for them. Let the employee tell you what they need to be most productive and then provide it, no questions asked.
 - Most job positions will require between five and 20 websites. Employees know what they need. Ask them to provide a list.
- » Show employees the web monitoring reports. Let them see the before and after and let them see the on-going reports. This will encourage self monitoring. This is an enforcement tool in disguise. Employees know that management can view these reports too and will take care that they make them look good.
 - Send employees a weekly report on their Internet usage. They will look at and will act upon to make sure they are portrayed to management in the best light and may even compare themselves against others.

Conclusion

Web monitoring is good for business. The Internet as a productivity tool has wide acceptance but recent changes have brought new distractions costing business some of those productivity gains. The Internet can be controlled but needs to be done in a way that allows for employee buy-in, self monitoring and self enforcement to be successful.

About GFI

GFI Software provides web and mail security, archiving, backup and fax, networking and security software and hosted IT solutions for small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) via an extensive global partner community. GFI products are available either as on-premise solutions, in the cloud or as a hybrid of both delivery models. With award-winning technology, a competitive pricing strategy, and a strong focus on the unique requirements of SMEs, GFI satisfies the IT needs of organizations on a global scale. The company has offices in the United States (North Carolina, California and Florida), UK (London and Dundee), Austria, Australia, Malta, Hong Kong, Philippines and Romania, which together support hundreds of thousands of installations worldwide. GFI is a channel-focused company with thousands of partners throughout the world and is also a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner.

More information about GFI can be found at <http://www.gfi.com>.

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