Internet Filtering and Monitoring In your Business

CurrentWare

Introduction

The term Big Brother, coined by George Orwell in his book 1984, has been thrown around a lot recently with Edward Snowden blowing the whistle on the NSA. With all of this constantly in the media, companies have starting asking the question, "Are we being too big brother"?

Of course they're referring to the monitoring and filtering of their employee's internet access among other things. The question is where should they draw the line?

Companies want their employees to be as happy and productive as possible, and to do this they try to eliminate distractions. This means monitoring their employee's activities on computers, controlling which websites they're allowed to visit and etc.

With Snowden blowing the whistle in such a big way, companies are starting to wonder if they're watching and controlling their employee's internet too much. No company wants to be the NSA of the corporate world after all, especially now that employees are more conscious of how they are being tracked.

Ignorance was bliss in the past, companies and the government could silently watch their employees/citizens every move and they wouldn't know any better. Now there is a big question as to whether or not it's worth it, and whether or not it's ethical.

The truth is that most companies do in fact monitor their employee's internet activities. 66% of companies reported that they did monitor web surfing back in 2007. Since then with the growing uses and integration of the internet, I can't see that number falling. There is a question behind the ethics of monitoring your employee's internet activities. With the recent NSA scandals some people think it is unethical to

BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU

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Monitor what your people are doing, and that they should be allowed to browse the web as they please.

I would like to put the ethics question to rest. There is a very good reason why monitoring and filtering are ethical. It's completely legal to monitor or filter your employee's internet activity. Now I know you're probably saying, "Well law and ethics don't always go hand in hand…" but law is a great indicator. The reason behind the law is that everything your employees use is technically the owner's property. They have a right to protect and do as they will with their property. There is nothing unethical about that.

Okay so it's ethical, but is it worth it? According to Nielsen's quarterly Three Screen Reporter on U.S. media usage - approximately 44% of all online video is being viewed at the workplace. A later report shows that 29% of working adults access adult websites from work computers. For that alone controlling the internet is worth it, the lost productivity for all that wasted time could be costing your company tens of thousands of dollars a year.

Now image the damage a single bad employee could do with unlimited access to the internet. And let's face it, the longer a company runs and the bigger it gets the more likely it is you'll hire a bad employee. It's just an eventuality of running a business. Maybe a great worker in the past becomes disgruntled, or you hire a friend of a friend who just isn't working out for the company. What do you do? How do you find out they are wasting company time and resources? How do you know if they are a lawsuit waiting to happen?

These are serious security risks that make filtering or monitoring a necessity in the world of the internet. But is it really worth the cost? Which do you choose? Which works best for your company? That is the purpose of this white paper; to lay out the pros and cons of internet access control as well as some common set ups of the software.

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How does Internet Filtering Software Work?

Internet Filtering is the act of actually blocking websites that the employer wants employees to avoid. In general the software will have two different methods for blocking websites.

The first is to allow you to add specific URLs or categories of URLs to a Block List. This will allow you to pick and choose which websites you don't want your employees visiting. This method works for companies who need their employees to conduct research, or to have decently unrestricted access to the internet.

The second method involves simply turning off the internet completely, and allowing URLs or categories of URLs to be surfed. This method works quite well for companies who have limited need of the internet. For example libraries or hospitals would only need their clerks to access the administrative websites they would be using.

For these purposes web filtering is very useful. It allows you to control which websites your employees go to. There are some down sides however; sometimes a website you want allowed will be blocked. Then you need to go back into the software, change the policy, and waste the time of all the parties involved. Also your employees cannot take a break during work and check the score of last night's games, or catch up on social media (Although some programs have a scheduling feature). By limiting what they can and cannot do you may create disgruntled employees who don't feel trusted and fully enabled.

But what about the middle group of people? What about the group of people who need to use the internet for their daily tasks, but filtering their internet could cause problems? What about the employers who don't want to deal with adding URLs to allow/block lists? This is where internet monitoring software comes in.

How does Internet Monitoring Software Work?

Internet monitoring software does exactly what the word means. It records your activity on the internet (URLs visited, bandwidth used etc) and lets you generate reports on it. This is a very interesting take on internet security, and comes with its pros and cons.

It allows the employer to show that it trusts, to some extent, its employees by giving them full access to the internet. It also instills the notion in the back of the employee's head that they are being watched, and that if they slack off on Facebook then they will be caught. Also if an employee wanted to take a 15 minute break and catch up on the game from last night then then they could do that. Not to mention the fact that it allows you to identify and let go of ineffective employees.

Of course there are cons to internet tracking as well. For one some products send large amounts of data over the network, which can really tax your network's speed. On the other hand, if you are not open about monitoring employees and they find out through external means, it can cause serious problems between employees and management.

How to Monitor Internet Usage Effectively?

How do you use internet monitoring to your advantage? Well there are two common methods companies go about using internet monitoring.

The first is generating aggregate data, and seeing what websites are most visited/what sites are visited. If they see websites that people shouldn't be visiting then they take action on those employees.

The second is having the program in the background, and only generating reports when there is a need. Let's say one department has had an extremely unproductive month, human resources might take a look to see how they're spending their time online.

Both methods work quite well, it really just depends how proactive management wants to be in monitoring internet usage.

But do you need internet filtering/monitoring? Here are some key questions you need to consider.

Key Questions to Ask about your Business

Does your Business need Internet Filtering and Monitoring Software?

Most managers will know it's needed if a really bad case of internet abuse appears where it becomes a serious problem. But by then it's too late, damage has already been done. You need the software before that point to prevent internet abuse from happening. So to know how necessary internet control is for your company you need to try it. You don't know you need it until you have it.

Thankfully there is an easy solution, many software companies (such as CurrentWare) offer free trials of their software. By using a trial, managers can get a good feel for the necessity of internet surveillance software. Just be warned, you will be unpleasantly surprised at the results.

Have you established an Internet Usage Policy for your Business?

Everything comes down to rules; if you have a well-defined internet usage policy, web monitoring/filtering software becomes an excellent tool to enforce the policy.

It also promotes transparency and trust with employees as you are very upfront about what they are and are not allowed to use the internet for.

Without a clearly stated internet usage policy, monitoring and filtering can been seen as enforcing rules that don't exist, which is sneaky and draconian.

How many companies monitor and control their employees' Internet access?

66% of companies monitor their employee's internet activities.

45% of companies even go further and key log, meaning they track every button their employee's touch.

How long do employees really spend browsing the internet for personal use?

According to a poll done by about.com employees spend somewhere between one and three hours a day surfing the web on personal business at work. That's a lot of productivity lost each and every day.

What websites are employers concerned with their employees visiting?

Of those companies who choose to monitor their employee's Internet activities, 96% are concerned with sexual, romantic, or pornographic content, 61% are concerned about social media, 40% are concerned with entertainment sites, 27% are concerned with shopping, and 21% are concerned with sports.

What Websites are Employers Concerned with their Employees Visiting

Category	Percentage
Sexual...	96%
Social Media	61%
Entertainme...	40%
Shopping	27%
Sports	21%
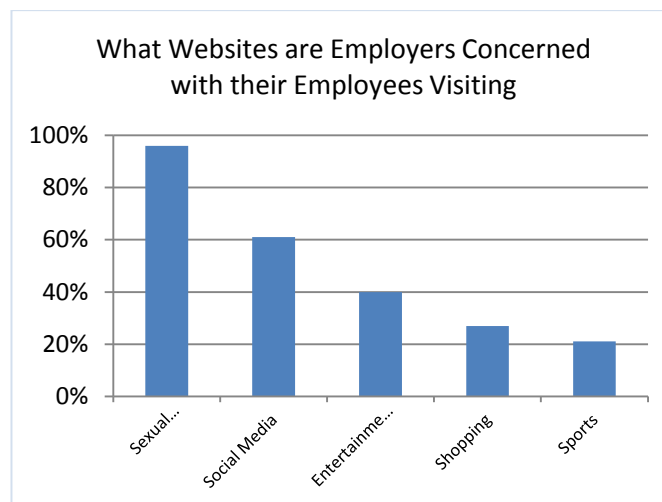
Do you really need software to Control and Monitor your Employees?

Yes! Every business should have employee monitoring software. There are some exceptions obviously; if you work beside your only employee then you probably don't need to use software to monitor his activities.

Any company with over 5 employees however needs to consider it. The productivity that is lost through personal browsing is astonishing, and with the growing importance of the internet it is only bound to get worse.

Summary

The internet is a vital asset to every business in the modern age. It has limitless potential for research, sales, and marketing, meaning a company that isn't connected isn't a company that will last for long. However with all good, comes evil. In this case, evil comes in the form of personal browsing and wasting company time. The internet is a massive source of entertainment, which can entice employees to waste hours when they should be working.

Business owners and managers around the globe struggle to keep their employees focused on a daily basis, and the answer for the internet is filtering and monitoring. Both are methods of enforcing the rules a company has about internet usage. Both work equally well and can be deployed in ways that best suit an individual business's needs.

The lost productivity is too large to ignore, every business needs either filtering or monitoring capabilities. The only question that should be on your mind is which one to use. Not whether or not you need it.

BrowseControl

BrowseControl is an internet filtering program that allows users to restrict inappropriate surfing. It's lightweight, so it doesn't slow your computers or network, but still boasts all the features and more that management requires.

With it you can allow/block websites by URL or URL Category, set different rules and permissions for different users, allow/block programs, set schedules and much more!

Everything a business needs for internet filtering – Download BrowseControl at:

http://www.currentware.com/browsecontrol/download-form

BrowseReporter

BrowseReporter is an internet monitoring program that allows users to actively monitor and generate reports on employee's internet activity. Like BrowseControl it's very lightweight meaning it doesn't tax your network. Although it is lightweight it still has all the reporting features a business could need.

You can still generate reports on which URL is visited, bandwidth usage, how long an employee spends on a certain website (actively using as well as total time) and much more! Not to mention that it runs in complete stealth mode preventing workers from finding it and removing it.

If you need web monitoring software look no further – Download BrowseReporter at:

http://www.currentware.com/browsereporter/download-form

CurrentWare

CurrentWare is a global leader of Internet and Endpoint Security solutions. We are committed to delivering products with the immediate benefits of increasing productivity, enhancing security and improving cost savings. CurrentWare products are intuitive to manage and focus on solving real world computing challenges.

To learn more about controlling and monitoring your employee's Internet access, visit our website at http://www.currentware.com

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CurrentWare's Internet Management Solutions

| **BrowseControl** | **BrowseReporter** | **AccessPatrol** | **enPowerManager** |
| Internet Restriction | Internet Monitor | Endpoint Security | Power Management |