



SurfControl helps African airline make the most of scarce bandwidth

The Background

Kenya Airways, headquartered in Nairobi, is the major airline serving East Africa. Together with its strategic partner KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, it is the leading operator on all domestic routes within Kenya as well as operating scheduled passenger and cargo services to major destinations in sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. It has international sales offices or agents in all the countries to which it flies, in addition to a network of travel and cargo agents within Kenya itself. The 30-strong IT team manages a network of 1,000 workstations, in a company with about 3,500 employees.

The Requirements

Kenya Airways, like all airlines, needs a fast, reliable communications infrastructure to serve its customers with instant, accurate information and flight booking services. During the past few years it has made substantial investments in infrastructure, as well as in network-wide performance monitoring and capacity planning. All workstations have Internet access either directly through the Nairobi head office or over a corporate virtual private network.



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James Munene
IT manager

Bandwidth is expensive, within Kenya itself as well as between the Nairobi head office and international satellite offices and agents. Kenya Airways’ Nairobi head office operates on a fraction of the bandwidth available to large companies in other countries: a 312 kbps uplink and 512 kbps downlink. This creates the need to control and monitor use of this scarce resource. “Internet access is an essential business tool nowadays,” says IT manager James Munene, “but there is potential for abuse. When staff spend time visiting sports, news and music sites, their productivity suffers.”

There are direct costs as well: “Bandwidth is very expensive here, and limited,” says Munene. “When everyone is using the network, especially if they’re visiting multimedia sites, that chews our bandwidth. It’s expensive as well as unproductive”. Uncontrolled downloads also expose Kenya Airways to the threat of malicious software and viruses.

The Solution

Having considered a number of Internet monitoring and filtering tools, Munene’s team decided SurfControl E-mail and Web Filter products offered the best fit with their needs, as well as the best value. It was particularly important, says Munene, to get a product that enabled control of both Web surfing and e-mail in a single package.

The Results

“SurfControl has had a huge impact,” says Munene. “The bandwidth saving has been calculated at approximately 30%. We’ve been able to give more people in the company access to the Internet without expanding our bandwidth, and we’ve virtually eliminated unproductive use of the Internet.”

The flexible management SurfControl provided has also allowed Munene’s team to switch resources quickly to places where they’re needed. “Kenya Airways took a stand at a recent big exhibition in Nairobi to publicise our online booking services, which is new to most people in Kenya. For this demonstration it was important that the online booking worked fast and smoothly – it had to be a best-case scenario. We used SurfControl to block all other Internet access temporarily so we could optimise the bandwidth to the exhibition site; it worked perfectly.”

Given Kenya’s high bandwidth costs, says Munene, SurfControl “probably paid for itself in two months. It’s a great product.”