



Culver City, California

Culver City, California was an early adopter of municipal wireless networks and had established an exemplary free Wi-Fi system in its Town Plaza area. The city's IT Department then discovered that peer-to-peer (P2P) usage and pornography on the Wi-Fi network was exposing the city and taxpayers to possibly serious liabilities and policy issues. They now use the CopySense Network Appliance to filter problem content.

"A demo of the CopySense Appliance on our municipal Wi-Fi network really opened our eyes to the potential trouble we were into."

—John Richo, Director of Information Technology

Overview

Industry

- Government / Municipality & County

Challenges

- Free, public-access wireless Internet access was being used for copyright infringing P2P file trading and access to pornographic content
- Bandwidth throttling measures failed to discourage this type of use
- The city and its tax payers faced liability risks and disapproved of being a facilitator for these kinds of content

Solution

- Filter P2P and web content with the CopySense® Network Appliance

Benefits

- Blocks illegal P2P file trading and access to pornography
- Relieves liability risk
- Aligns with taxpayer priorities
- Regains lost bandwidth
- Easy to use and manage

The Westside Los Angeles Area community Culver City, also known as the "Heart of Screenland," is home to three motion picture studios and nearly 40,000 residents. A ten-year redevelopment project transformed the old downtown area into what is now known as Town Plaza, complete with new trend-setting restaurants, retail shops and art galleries. Providing continuing incentives for pedestrian traffic and more new businesses, Culver City chose to become the first municipality in the area to offer free, public-access wireless Internet access.

A mesh Wi-Fi system was installed covering ten square blocks. Even before the new network was announced, nearly a dozen people signed in the first day it was switched on. Now businesses, citizens and visitors enjoy free wireless Internet access indoors or outdoors within the coverage area, and banners around town advertise its availability.

The IT Department had implemented bandwidth throttling in an attempt to discourage network misuse. However, Audible Magic pointed out that throttling cannot curtail illicit use, and most throttling devices fail to keep pace with new P2P developments. Culver City agreed to run a network analysis with the easy to install CopySense Network Appliance. According to John Richo, Director of Information Technology, "Up to that point, my mantra had been free and open access to everybody! But then I got the first report from the CopySense Appliance. I was shocked to learn some of the things we were servicing with our open network."

Running in analysis mode over a few weeks, the CopySense Appliance reported that several times per day, Culver City's Wi-Fi system was being used to illegally trade (upload and download) copyrighted music and video files, including pornographic videos, as well as to access pornographic web sites. The convenience of free, high-speed Internet access had attracted a wide range of uses, including some that caused potential liabilities.

Richo remarked, "Our hotspot was facilitating trading of illegal content. We don't condone copyright infringement, and we saw that we were at risk. Public agencies can be viewed as having deep pockets, and we are very sensitive to liability issues. Besides, P2P file trading and pornographic web sites are bandwidth hogs, and taxpayers don't want municipal funds used to enable illegal activity or minor's access to porn."

Culver City now uses the CopySense appliance to filter unwanted content from their network. Illicit P2P file trading is blocked, and access to pornographic web sites is blocked as well. "We encourage people to call or email us if they have any concerns about the network," said Richo. "We've had a few calls about lack of P2P access, but when we mentioned copyright infringement, the conversations ended. We certainly don't expect anyone to go before the city council to argue for free access to copyright infringing file trading."

Culver City found the CopySense Appliance very easy to set up and manage. Richo said "I don't know it's there unless I ask for a report, and that's the way I want it." Wi-Fi manager Carlos Vega remarked about the discoveries made just after installation, "from the first days the information the CopySense Appliance gave us was invaluable; it would have taken me weeks to gather the data on my own."

Other Los Angeles Area communities have been contacting Culver City to model their success. Richo now suggests that P2P management and pornography filtering should be required in all proposals for municipal Wi-Fi projects.

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