Problem Case Study || Financial Services Liability

Managing liabilities is part of the cost of doing business; extraordinary liabilities such as hostile workplace suits, negative public relations and the negligent disclosure of personally identifiable information can go a long way towards sinking a business. For financial institutions, Internet abuse also includes the transmission of sensitive customer data such as Social Security numbers. Gramm-Leach-Bliley dictates that financial companies are responsible for ensuring that proprietary information is protected.

These issues drove Glasgow Hicks Company, an independent insurance company in Wilmington, NC, to monitor Internet use. According to president and CEO, Charlotte Hicks, "You walk by employees' desks and see them furiously typing away, apparently hard at work. In reality they may be trading stocks or emailing jokes to friends."

The Solution

Hicks asked Cornestōn Solutions, a firm specializing in outsourced technology consulting, to install software to monitor her employees' online habits. Cornestōn's initial software choice, however, was difficult to manage because it worked on the premise of creating "allow" and "block" lists that dictated where employees could go online. Reflected Cornestōn, "It was a nightmare. Every time an agent tried to visit a new web page, we had to manually make a change. It was incredibly frustrating for the agents and very time consuming for us."

They next tried Pearl Software's Pearl Echo® Internet Management Software. Pearl Echo can provide employees with unfettered access to the Internet and then report back on the sites they have visited. In addition to monitoring web browsing, Pearl Echo monitors most common forms of Internet communications including the content of email, chat, file transfers, blog postings and instant messaging. Pearl Echo can also be set to flag text patterns and keywords to protect privacy and the unlawful dissemination of confidential information.

Success in the Field

Charlotte Hicks recalled, "Our software investment paid off right away. While checking email use, I noticed one employee was sending up to 80 personal emails per day. After showing her the report, I didn't have to say another word. The problem was immediately resolved."

Glasgow Hicks' employees were also relieved. Instead of being blocked from many sites that were not on the "allow" list, they could now freely look for quotes or research new policies.

Although Glasgow Hicks has a zero tolerance policy for personal Internet use at work, other financial institutions may choose to allow some personal access. For example, companies can use Pearl Echo to restrict personal use to certain times of the day—during lunch, for example. Allowing employees to shop online at lunchtime sometimes prevents extended lunch hours. It also boosts morale by allowing employees to send email correspondence to family or accomplish online errands.

According to Charlotte Hicks, "Our strategy is to prevent abuse before it ever happens."