A web proxy filter is a server or series of servers located between two computers — the computer making the request for a website and the computer that provides the content of the website. These devices monitor the information flowing between the two computers, which are connected to the proxy. The proxy will make and receive requests from either of the computers and will fulfill those requests. The proxy machine provides a separation between the two computers and prevents direct connections between them.

The Benefits of Web Proxy Filters
Web proxy filters are a new service that allows for your web traffic to be monitored and checked for malware. As more and more e-mail viruses utilize the web or components on the web to infect computers, this service is growing in importance and is becoming another tool in the arsenal to protect your data from business continuity interruptions due to malware.

Third-party web proxy filters are generally billed for as a monthly per-user fee. The costs are fairly reasonable at only a few dollars per user per month. Most service providers range between $1 and $5 dollars per user.

How Does a Web Proxy Filter Work?
Web proxy filters are generally purchased from third parties who provide the proxy service. You simply direct all the web traffic to the proxy by entering the proxy server information in the browser of choice. When a user goes to a website, the information requested goes to the provider's proxy. The proxy receives the request and forwards the request on to the website being requested while substituting its information for the return connection. The website being requested sends back the information requested to the proxy, which checks it for malicious content before sending it on to the requesting user.

This process applies to all Internet requests including downloads and ActiveX

doing so and receive a message showing that the filtering service has blocked the site. Each service categorizes website content into various categories and then blocks that content if selected for blocking to prevent employees from accessing the content.

More Benefits of Web Proxy Filters
Beyond the ability to keep malware off production computers, the next most important benefit of using a web proxy filter is the ability to prevent users from going places on the Internet that are contrary to the policies of the organization. These filters prohibit access to all kinds of different categories of content and can be turned on or off as necessary. In addition, using a web proxy filter allows for management to not have to worry about malware content sneaking into computers and prevents the extra expense of having your technical personnel spend time cleaning malware off computers. Removing this threat source helps keep the computers running effectively.

Why is this important for Practicing Accountants?
This tool is an important tool for practicing accountants because of the information and records with which we deal. Malware is an especially troubling threat to accountants because it creates the ability for someone to gain access to our computers and networks without our knowledge and potentially obtain confidential information.

While owners of a public accounting firm are always concerned about these issues (and in some cases, it may keep some awake at night), sometimes our employees do not always think about the impact malware has on our businesses and the clients we service. Employees may be more than happy to click on that clever movie link on YouTube that cousin Betty sent to them at the office. They do not stop and

think about the fact that the creator of that content might have embedded malware

who don't always think about the impact of opening that YouTube video at the office.

Summary

Web proxy filters are a nice addition to the security regimen in an accounting firm. The very reasonable cost makes it a tremendous benefit to operational costs and stability. By using a third-party web proxy service, a firm will enhance its security and reduce the risks associated with malware. It also provides peace of mind for management because it allows for management to protect employees
from themselves without being heavy handed. It also reduces the time spent educating
employees and/or cleaning up their mess after they do something foolish.

MX Logic has been the industry leader in the development of web proxy filtering. Several organizations I know have utilized this service and found it to be a very beneficial tool in reducing the ability of malware to infiltrate their network and computers. While MX Logic is not the only provider of these services, they are worth investigating as a service provider of web proxy filtering. Other players to consider are Postini, NetCleanse and AppRiver.

Security Update Checklist for Tax Season

Have you done the following in preparation for this tax season?

- Run Microsoft Update on all your computers and, at a minimum, installed all critical security updates.
- Updated all accounting applications including your software accounting suite (QuickBooks, Peachtree, etc.) to make sure they are all current.
- Updated all the drivers for the servers and workstations in your network.
- Updated your browser software if not using Internet Explorer.

- Updated your firewall firmware.

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