Postini Incident Report

Message Quarantining - November 16, 2010

Prepared for Postini Customers

The following is the incident report for the quarantining of some legitimate messages and associated delivery issues on November 16, 2010. We understand that this service issue has affected our valued customers and their users, and we apologize for the impact.

Issue Summary

Beginning on 5:45 AM PT | 13:45 GMT, November 16, a spam filter update mistakenly classified some legitimate messages as spam, and subsequently quarantined the messages.

An estimated fewer than 3% of incoming messages sent during this period were incorrectly quarantined. Due to a secondary effect of the filtering error, some additional legitimate messages were temporarily deferred as junk messages. No messages were bounced or deleted.

During the incident, status information about the incident was posted to the "Current Issues" page of the Postini Help Center.

Root Cause Analysis

Background: Postini provides multiple levels of threat protections including a proprietary anti-spam engine, threat network identification, and anti-botnet and anti-spam heuristics. Postini Engineering also periodically releases spam filters targeted at emerging attacks (for example, a new wave of spoofed newsletters with download links to viruses).

The root cause was an error in a spam filter update, which unintentionally extended scope of messages triggering the filter, and as a result, some legitimate messages were misidentified as spam. Once the issue was detected, Postini Engineering revoked the filter update at 7:02 AM PT | 15:02 GMT, November 16.

Since the messages triggered the spam filter, the Postini network effect protection also identified some of sending addresses as possible sources of spam. The service temporarily deferred additional messages from the sending IPs for up to two hours (to 9:00 AM PT | 17:00 GMT), and resulted in the delayed delivery of these messages.

Mitigation Actions

As a workaround, users with access to the quarantine summary or Message Center can release the affected messages from quarantine. To help administrators, Postini Engineering began the work to identify the affected messages immediately after the defective filter was removed. At approximately 4:30 PM PT, November 16 | 00:30 GMT, November 17, Postini Engineering started the process to rescan only those messages caught by spam filter update, and to automatically redeliver the legitimate messages to users' inboxes. For those customers with Postini Message Archiving, the messages will also be captured for archiving. Note: This process may result in duplicate delivery for messages already released from quarantine by the user or administrator.

As we have updates to the redelivery process, we will post information to the Current Issues page. For those customers who filed a case with Customer Support, we will also send a notification by email when the redelivery process completes.

Corrective and Preventative Measures

The Postini Engineering and Support teams conducted an internal review and analysis, and are performing the following actions to help address the underlying causes of the problem and help prevent recurrence:

- Postini Engineering recently developed a tool that tests spam filter candidates against an expanded corpus of clean messages in order to detect possible false positives. Engineering now automatically runs this tool against filter updates as part of the release process.
- To improve validation of spam filters, Postini Engineering is implementing internal alerts that warn when new spam filter rules have a high potential for widespread impact.
- Postini Support will post this type of delivery issue to the Status Dashboard (instead of the Current Issues page) to improve visibility to customers. The Status Dashboard offers a RSS feed to automatically notify customers and provide ongoing updates.

We appreciate your patience and again apologize for the impact to your organization. We thank you for your business and continued support during this time.

Sincerely,

The Postini Team