Comparative Performance of Anti-Spam Gateways

Joel Snyder
Opus One
March, 2013

In Gartner's August, 2012 "Magic Quadrant for Secure Email Gateways," the analysts suggest that the anti-spam market is mature and that products are not differentiated based on their spam-filtering effectiveness. This statement is not entirely correct. In fact, there are significant differences in the underlying email filtering engines used by each of the significant vendors, and all email security products are *not* equal from the point of view of their ability to filter spam.

Opus One has performed monthly efficacy testing on anti-spam products for over seven years. Our unique and industry-leading methodology relies on actual corporate mail streams, manually analyzed for spam (including phish and other security threat messages) and non-spam email, run for approximately one week out of each month. This is a laborious process, but it provides significant real-world results--which differ from results obtained through automated tests based on artificial mail streams.

In December, 2012, Trend Micro asked Opus One to test products from the nine vendors identified by Gartner as Challengers or Leaders in the field (Barracuda Networks, Cisco, Google/Postini, McAfee, Microsoft, Proofpoint, Sophos, Symantec, and Trend Micro).

The two graphs below compare the catch rate (sensitivity) and false positive rate (positive predictive value) for each of the tested products. The products in the graph are not identified by name, except for Trend Micro, which had the highest catch rate. The results shown here are from the most common vendor-recommended configuration options for each product.