



FBI, USDA and Other Government Agencies to Certify E-mail with Goodmail

By Kate Kaye , July 31, 2007

Whether or not citizens trust the government, the growing use of digital communications by local, state and federal authorities means trusting government e-mail is increasingly important. A partnership between e-mail certification service Goodmail Systems and government e-mail communications provider GovDelivery will give around 150 government agencies, from the U.S. Treasury to Snohomish County, Washington, automatic authentication of e-mails used to communicate with citizens.

Whether it's counteracting spam, phishing or other scam attempts, "the problems [commercial e-mail marketers and governments] are grappling with are the same," said Goodmail VP of Marketing David Atlas.

GovDelivery will now enable Goodmail's CertifiedEmail system for all its clients, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service, Oregon Department of Human Services, Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada and the city of St. Paul, Minnesota, where GovDelivery is based.

"If you're a GovDelivery client, you are sending CertifiedEmail," said Atlas. GovDelivery clients won't have to pay any additional fees for the certification, which will be activated for all across the board. The contract between the two firms is based on a "volume commitment," according to Atlas.

The relationship gives Goodmail an automatic in with about 150 government entities, clients scored individually by GovDelivery over the past seven years or so.

"We actually had to get all these agencies on board one at a time across the country," said GovDelivery CEO Scott Burns, who said forming relationships with political consultants and important agency personnel helped win government clients. "It's important to collaborate with local people who are involved in politics and government...to at least get in the door so we're talking to the right people," he told ClickZ News. The company counts only public sector agencies as clients, and doesn't work with political campaigns.

According to a new report by Darrell West, Brown University professor and developer of the InsidePolitics.org Web site, 39 percent of government sites send e-mail updates, up from 21 percent in 2005 and just 5 percent in 2001. Nearly 90 percent of government sites have e-mail addresses today, up from 68 percent in '01.

"Citizens are signing up more for these updates," said Burns, who said governments -- like commercial marketers -- are using e-mail to drive users back to their sites as they improve content or add new information.



Goodmail's certification service sends e-mail messages labeled with cryptographically secure markers detectable by participating e-mail providers. Recipients recognize the secure messages by the blue ribbon inbox icon attached to them.

A few months after [AOL agreed to offer Goodmail certification](#) last year, the e-mail firm was the subject of a [protest effort](#) coordinated by a variety of unlikely allies including Gun Owners of America and Moveon.org Civic Action. The groups decried the potential negative impact of AOL's authentication program, concerned that e-mail senders such as non-profits and advocacy organizations that didn't pay extra for certification might receive inferior treatment when sending messages to AOL users.

Since AOL signed on, other ISPs including Comcast, Cox Communications, Time Warner Cable's Roadrunner, Verizon, and Yahoo have enabled the certification service. Nonprofit organizations like American Red Cross, Focus on the Family and Leukemia and Lymphoma Society use it for their e-mail communications.

Goodmail's Atlas expects the addition of the GovDelivery clients "will have a large impact on the awareness for CertifiedEmail."

Still, don't expect any certified messages from the Oval Office; according to Burns, GovDelivery doesn't count The White House as a client.