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USING .MAC IDISK WITH A WATCHGUARD FIREBOX

Products: WatchGuard Firebox System, various versions; .Mac iDisk service

Overview

Apple's .Mac service provides an online storage feature, called iDisk, which is accessible via WebDAV (or AFP, AppleTalk Filing Protocol, for older Mac operating systems). When attempting to use the iDisk from behind a WatchGuard Firebox firewall, some configuration changes on the firewall may be required. This technical note discusses the required changes.

More Information

One of the strengths of the WatchGuard Firebox series of firewalls is the inclusion of application-layer proxies for protocols such as SMTP, FTP, and HTTP. Whereas ordinary packet filtering firewalls and stateful inspection firewalls only control traffic based on IP address or TCP/UDP port number, application-layer proxies look deeper into the packet to make decisions on information such as URL, MIME content type, or similar (for an HTTP proxy, for example).

However, this advantage also becomes a disadvantage as many application-layer proxies may not understand or be compatible with protocol-specific extensions. In this particular case, the iDisk service uses WebDAV, an extension of the HTTP/1.1 protocol specification. It appears that, in general, other WebDAV services operate properly through the Firebox's HTTP proxy (although issues with Outlook Web Access were reported with earlier versions of the WatchGuard Firebox System software).

To make iDisk work from behind a WatchGuard Firebox firewall, one of several steps must be taken:

- Use the Filtered-HTTP service, which does not employ an application-layer HTTP proxy and therefore would not interfere with iDisk or other WebDAV-based applications or services.
- Modify the default properties of the Proxied-HTTP service to allow unknown headers.

Since the Proxied-HTTP service also provides WebBlocker functionality (for content filtering) and reporting, it is generally preferred to use the HTTP proxy instead of an ordinary HTTP packet filter. In order to make iDisk work with the HTTP proxy, the "Remove unknown headers" option must be unchecked in the configuration for the HTTP proxy, as shown on the following page in Figure 1.

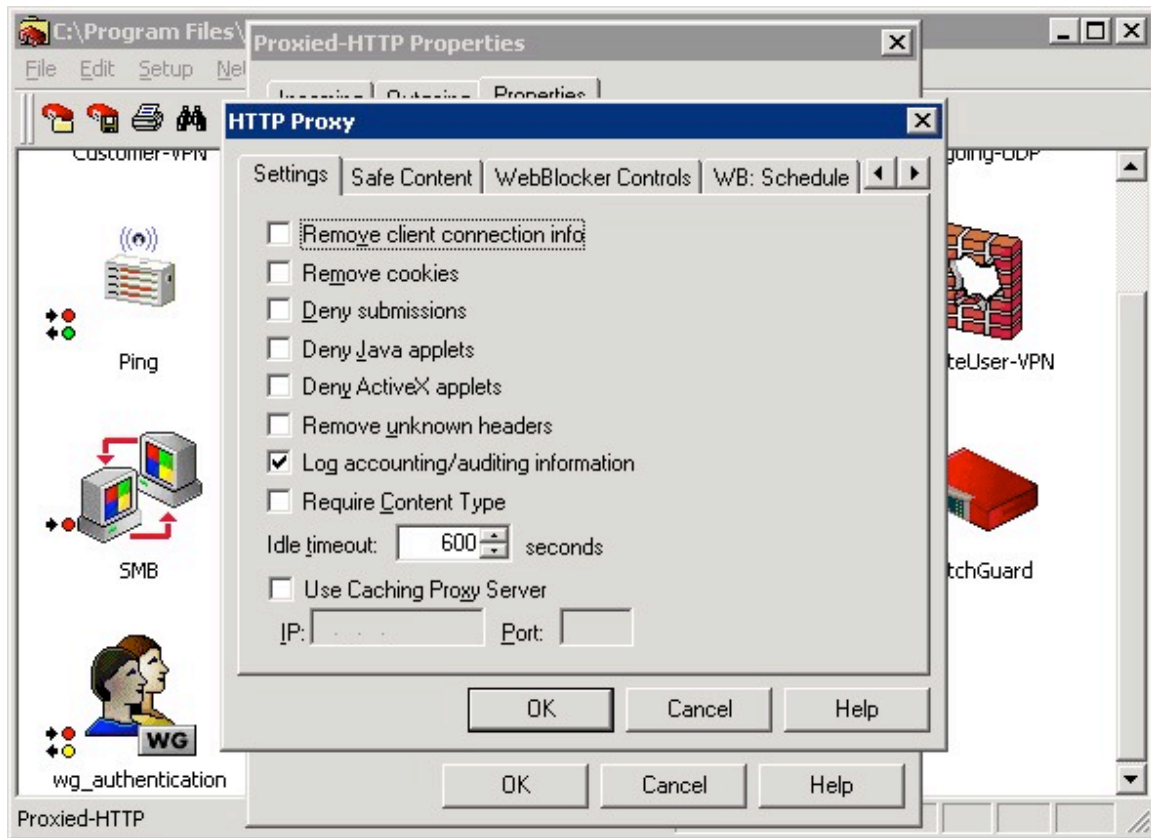


Figure 1. The HTTP proxy properties dialog box

By unchecking the “Remove unknown headers” option, the Firebox will allow non-RFC-compliant HTTP headers to pass through the firewall. Although it was not verified with a packet capture, apparently the iDisk uses one or more non-RFC-compliant headers and therefore requires this setting to be unchecked in order to work properly.

Other Notes

This technical note was tested using Mac OS X 10.2.8 connecting to iDisk through a WatchGuard Firebox II running version 6.2 (with Service Pack 1) of the WatchGuard Firebox System software. In addition, WebDAV-based connectivity to the iDisk from a Windows XP Professional-based system was also tested. Other versions of the WatchGuard Firebox System that utilize the HTTP proxy are most likely also affected.

Related Articles/Resources

None

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