

Product tutorial:

Eliminating referral sites and ads from GFI WebMonitor's surf time reports

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Intentional vs. unintentional web activity

One of the biggest challenges IT admins face as they try to monitor and measure web activity is distinguishing between direct (intentional) web browsing activity requests and indirect (unintentional) requests.

Take the following as an example. There is a difference between a user browsing to www.facebook.com and a user who goes to a work-related business site like www.techcrunch.com which embeds code that invokes social media content such as 'liking', 'sharing' or 'commenting'.

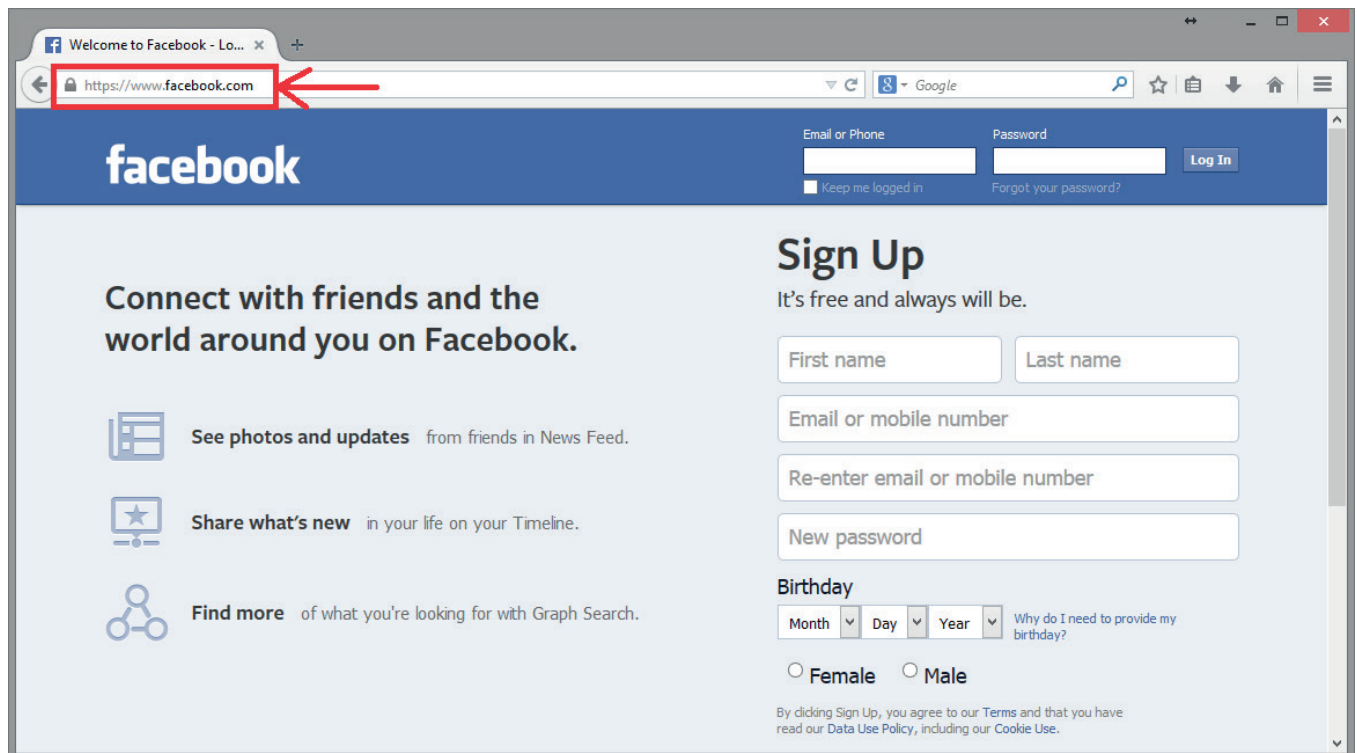


Figure 1: An example of a direct (intentional) web request to a social media platform.

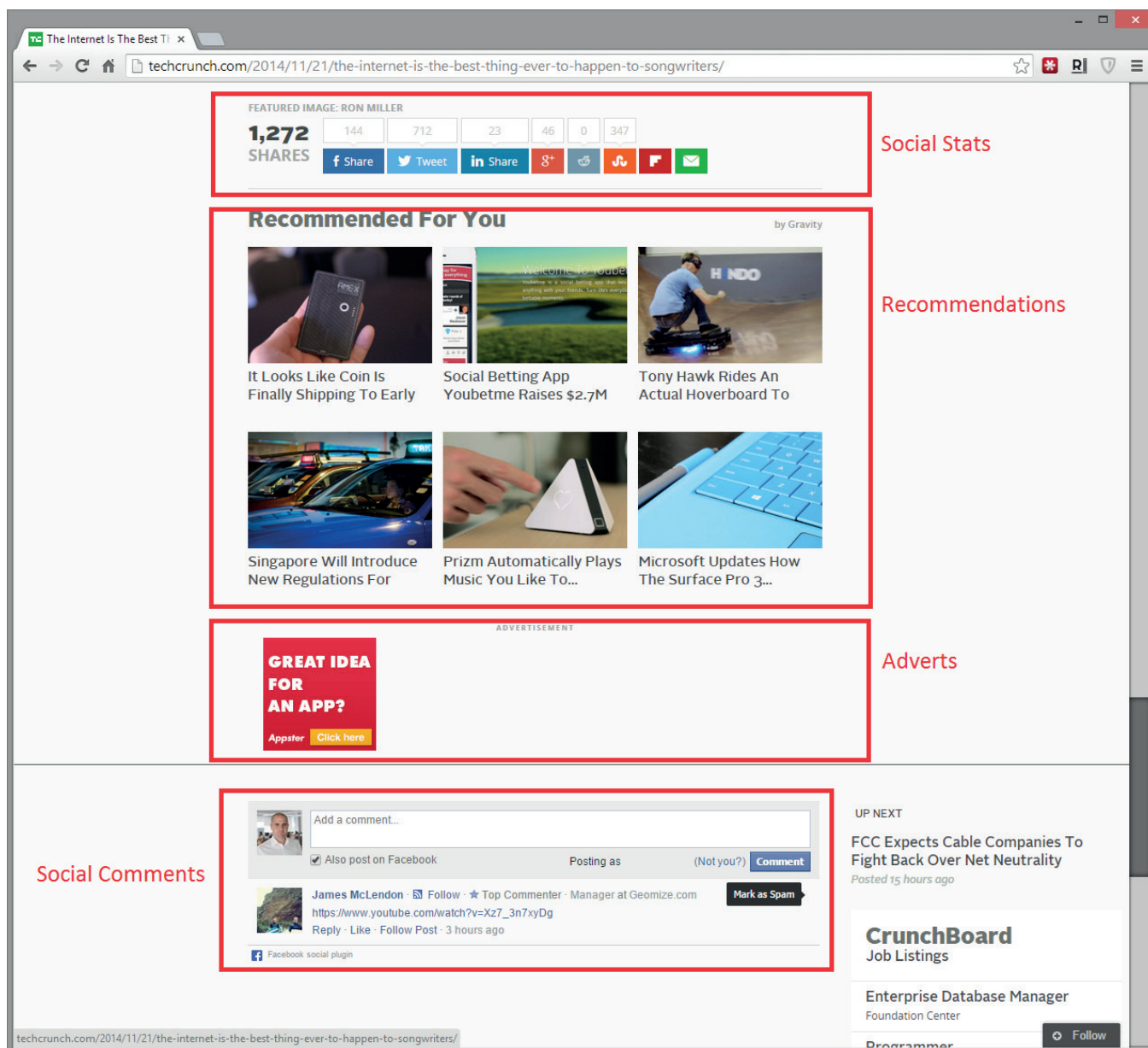


Figure 2: An example of an indirect (un-intentional) web request to social media platform.

From the end user's point of view, one might argue that he or she did not go to `www.facebook.com` or engage in direct Facebook activity. However, technically, when one looks under the hood, the nature of dynamic sites and embeddable content does indeed generate requests to social sites. This embedded content generally takes the form of components which appear on pages as 'Share' buttons, 'Like' buttons, 'Comment' sections, as well as adverts etc.

Moreover, sites which embed social media content such as Facebook login cookies generally load additional content to enhance the web experience for that user. Such an example would be the Facebook 'Like' button, or a comments section also displaying the picture of the currently logged in user etc. The reality is that while the user is interested in the main content, dynamic embedded content requests do occur.

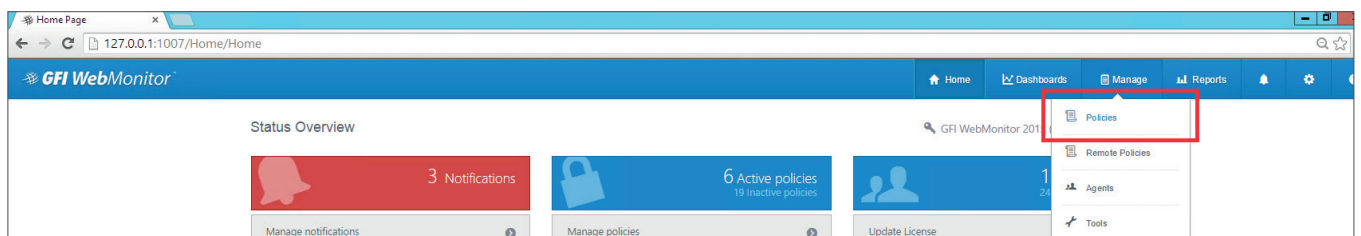
Administrators need a solution whereby they can differentiate between 'noise' requests such as advertisement and social media platform referrals and intentional site visits initiated by users.

How does GFI WebMonitor solve this problem?

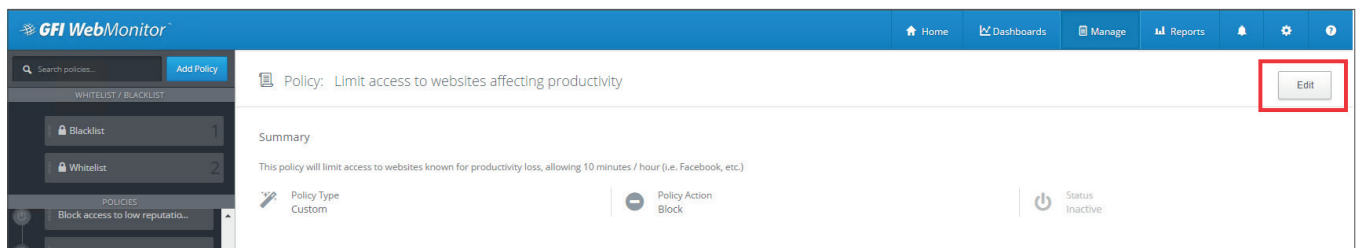
Out of the box, GFI WebMonitor ships with web filtering policies which enable IT admins to discover, manage and secure all activity. GFI WebMonitor gives administrators options to exclude these advertisement and social media referrals from loading in a website and in terms of reporting:

Firstly, you can configure GFI WebMonitor to totally block access to an entire category of web ads content found under 'Web Advertisements'. You can manage your policies by:

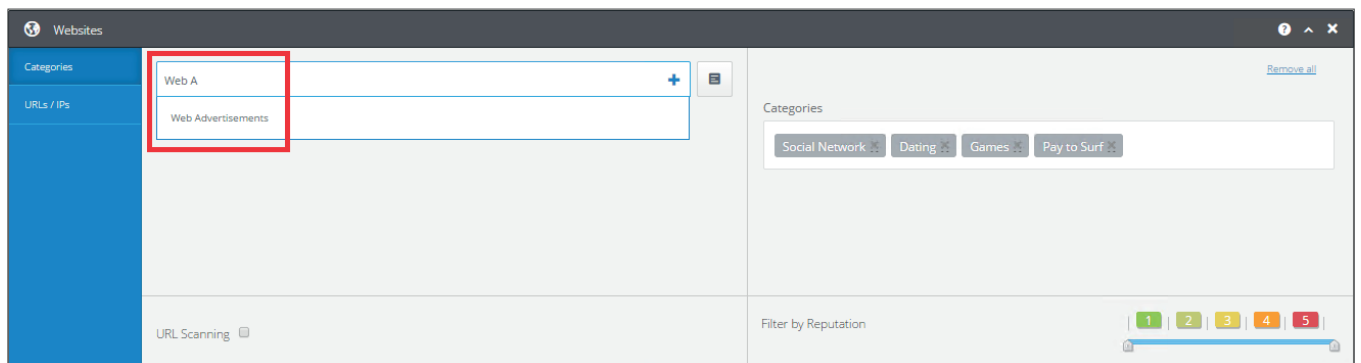
1. Clicking on 'Manage' and then 'Policies' in the main configuration

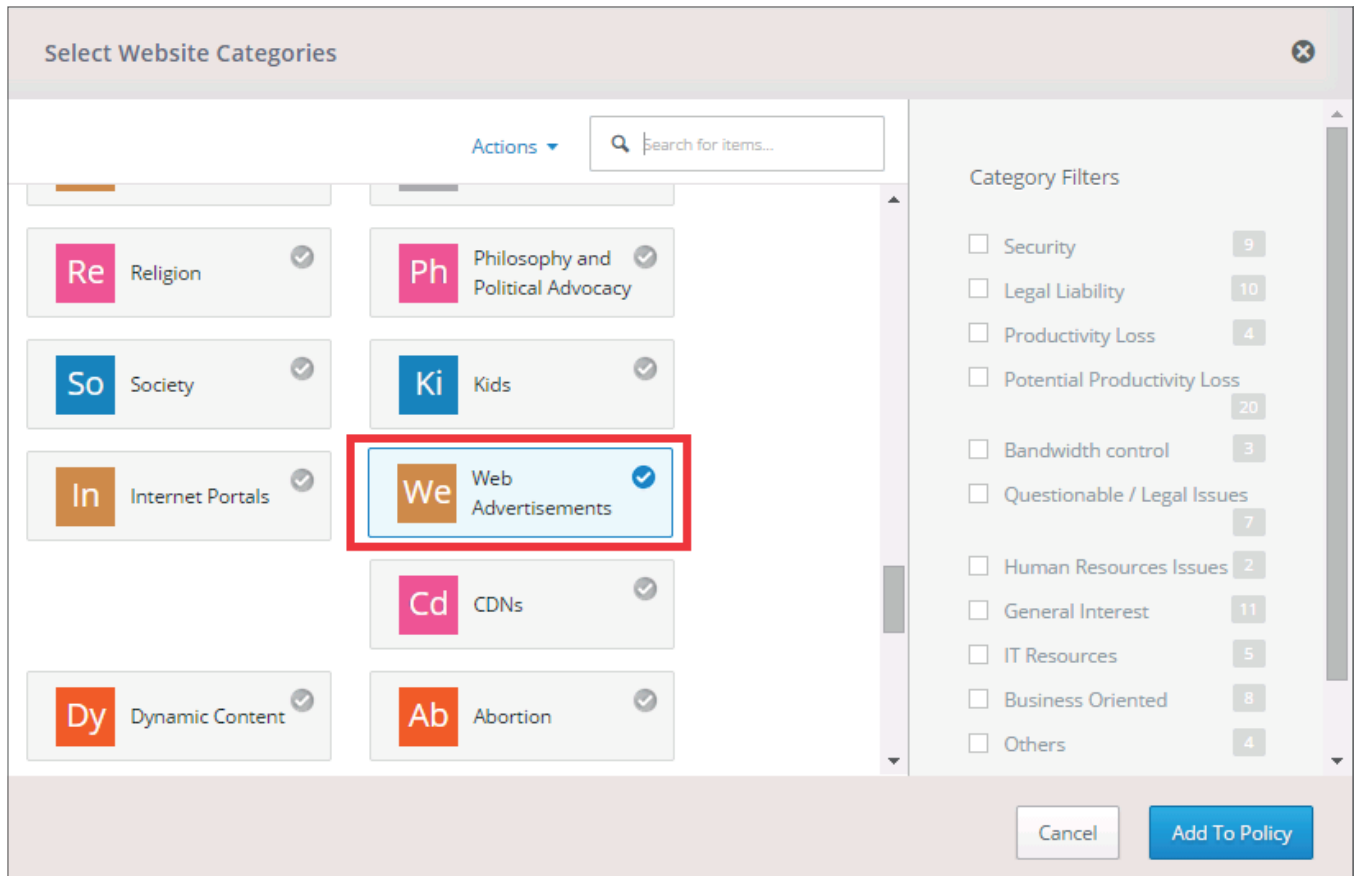


2. Here you can either edit an existing policy or create a new one



3. In the 'Websites' section, either type in 'Web Advertisements' or select its icon from the website category list.





By blocking this category alone, users will not have web advertisement content, such as the below presented to them. We do not recommend blocking CDNs as this might cause many websites to load incorrectly.

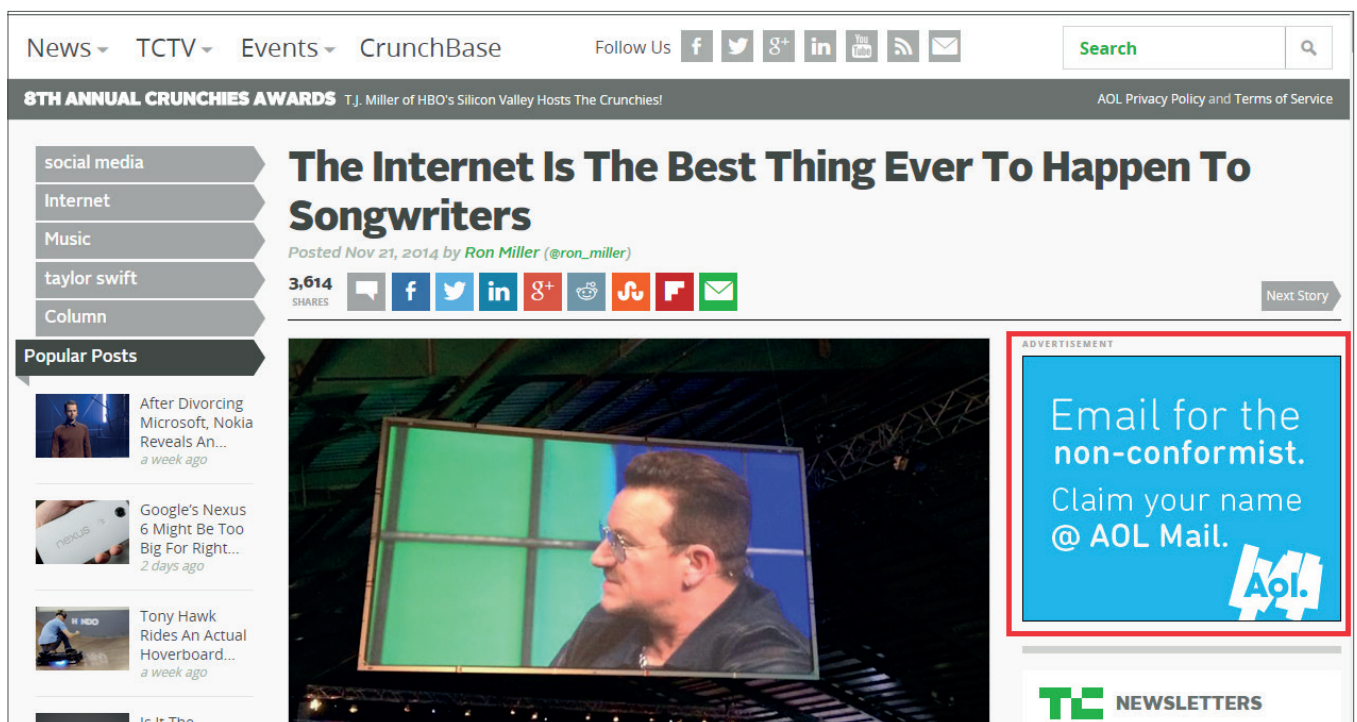


Figure 3: An example of embedded web advertisement content which can be blocked.

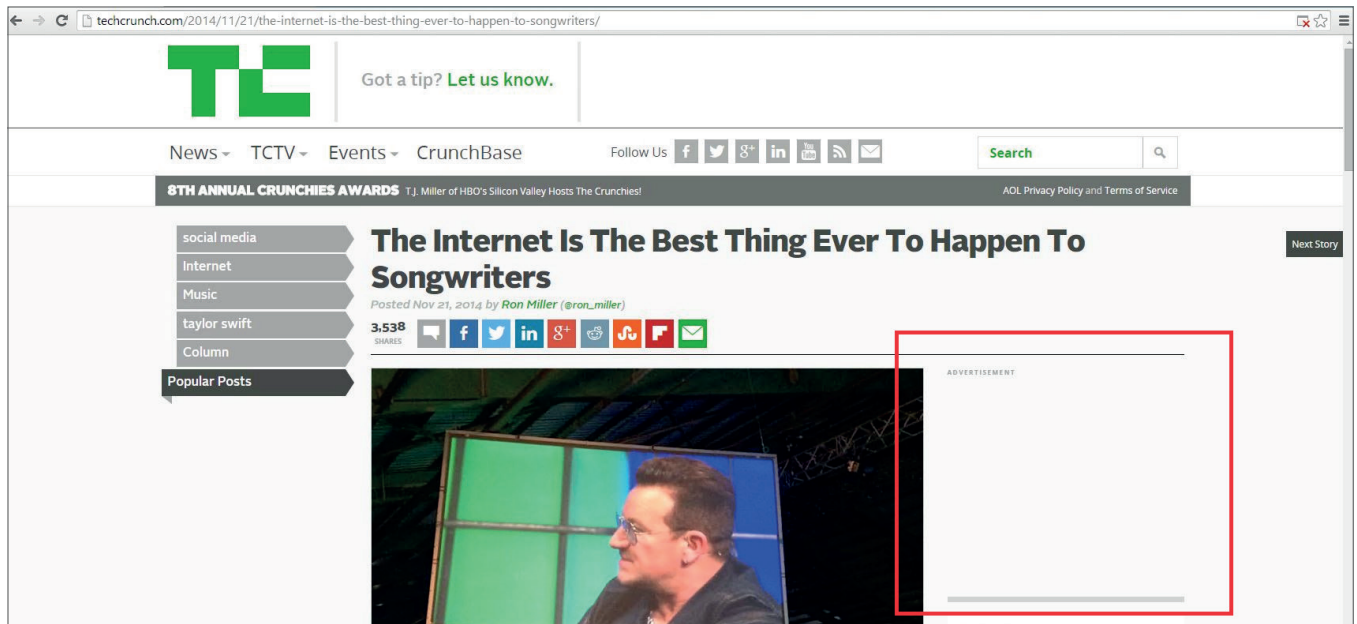


Figure 4: AOL advertisement has been blocked for the user

This not only prevents the advertisement content from loading on the website, but correctly categorizes the content as 'Web Advertisements' or 'CDNs' thus giving more accurate surf time reports.

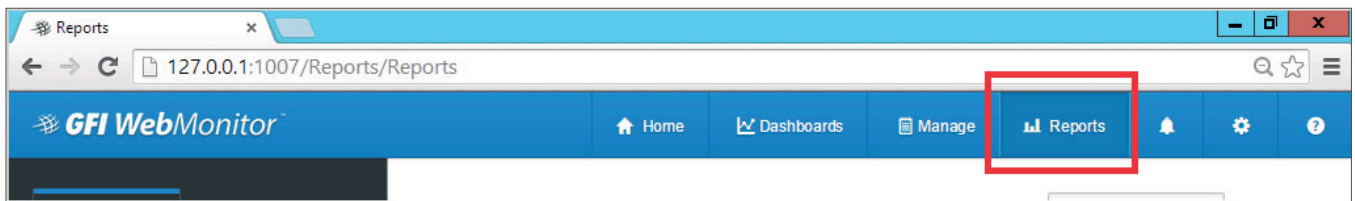


Date	Domain	Category	Surf Time	First Hit
24/11/2014	chartbeat.net	Computer and Internet Info	22 mins	14:03
	google.com	Search Engines	20 mins	14:10
	127.0.0.1	Private IP Addresses	11 mins	14:15
	aolcdn.com	Computer and Internet Info	8 mins	14:03
	facebook.com	Social Network	7 mins	14:03
	google.com.mt	Search Engines	6 mins	14:15
	simplereach.com	News and Media	5 mins	14:03
	chartbeat.com	Business and Economy	4 mins	14:03
	atwola.com	Business and Economy,News and Media	4 mins	14:03
	wp.com	Search Engines	3 mins	14:03
	wordpress.com	Personal Sites and Blogs	3 mins	14:03
	twitter.com	Social Network	3 mins	14:03
	techcrunch.com	Computer and Internet Info	3 mins	14:03
	scorecardresearch.com	Computer and Internet Info	3 mins	14:03
	reddit.com	Personal Sites and Blogs,News and Media	3 mins	14:03
	linkedin.com	Social Network	3 mins	14:03
	grvcdn.com	CDNs	3 mins	14:03
	gravity.com	Computer and Internet Info	3 mins	14:03
	flipboard.com	Society	3 mins	14:59
	facebook.net	Social Network	3 mins	14:03
	aolcdn.com	Unavailable	3 mins	14:03
	aolcdn.com	CDNs	3 mins	14:03

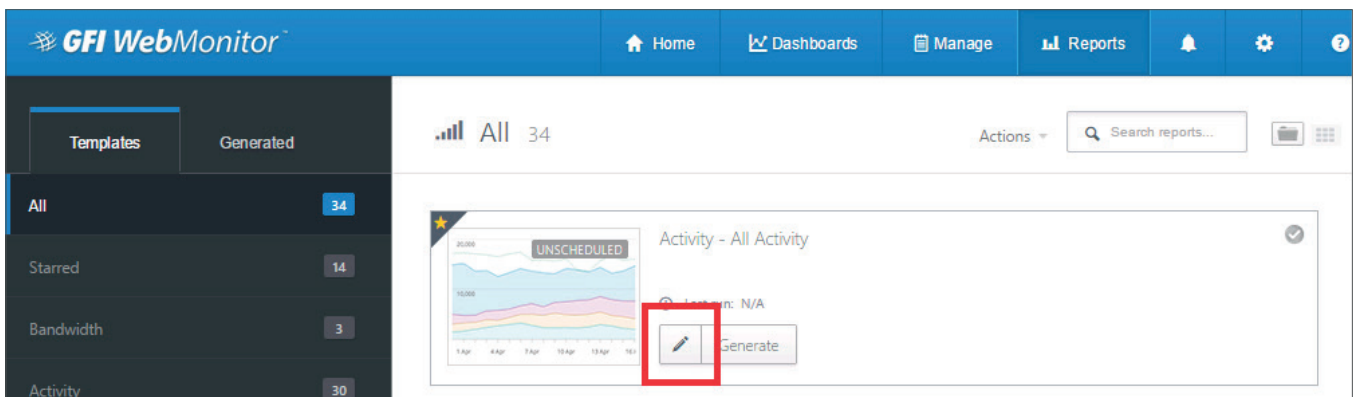
Figure 5: GFI WebMonitor Surf report listing the AOL advertisement as a CDN.

You can then edit your reports to exclude CDNs and Web Advertisements as shown below:

1. Click on 'Reports' in the main configuration



2. Select your desired report and click on the pen 'edit' icon



3. Click on the 'Data' tab, exclude the 'CDNs' and 'Web Advertisement' web categories and hit save.

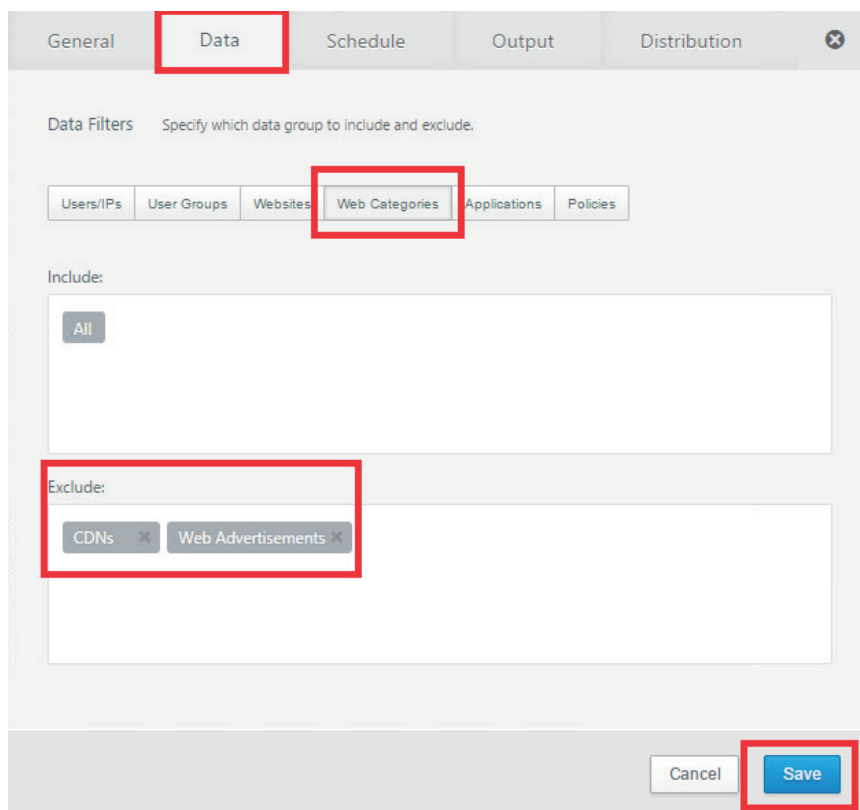
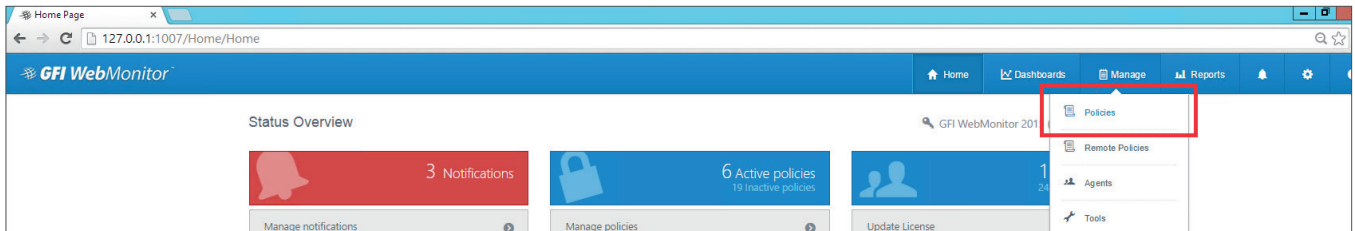


Figure 6: Excluding CDNs and Web Advertisements from reports.

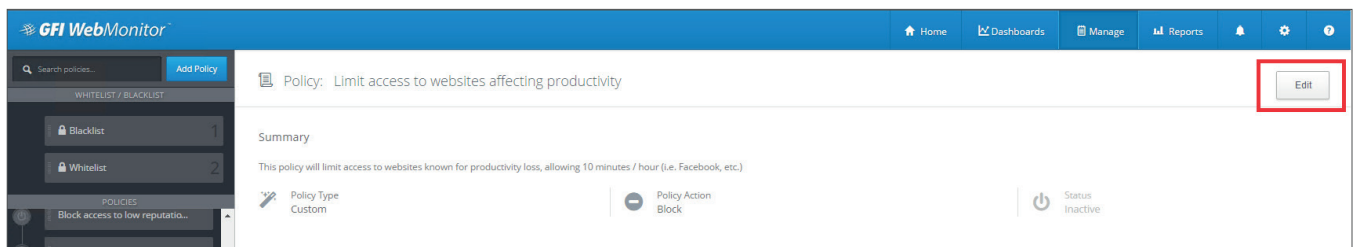
Secondly, you can enable 'Full URL Logging' in GFI WebMonitor to determine what URLs are being accessed and exclude them from your reports accordingly.

To enable full URL logging, follow these steps:

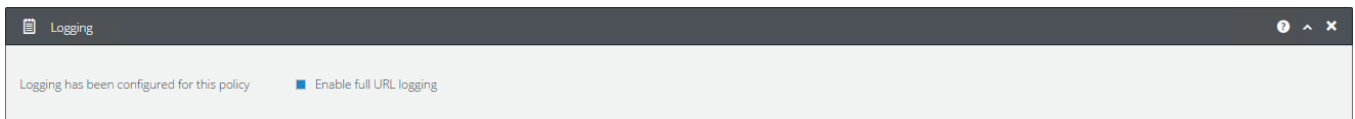
1. Open the GFI WebMonitor configuration and go to Manager > Policies



2. Here you can either edit an existing policy or create a new one



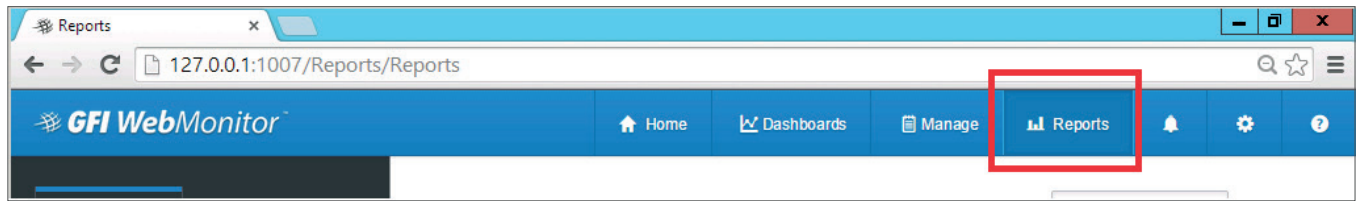
3. Scroll to the bottom of the policy editing screen and select the 'Enable full URL logging' box:



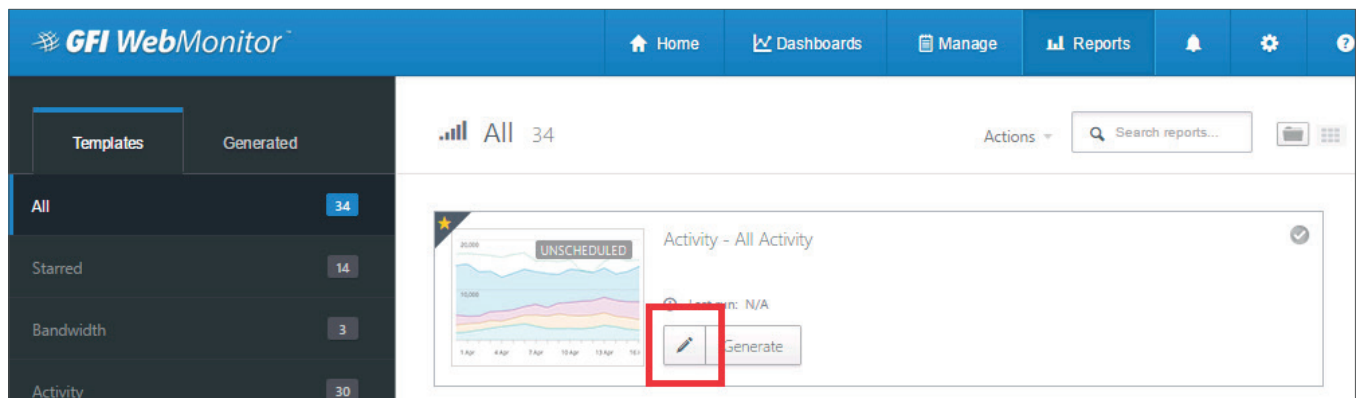
With full URL logging, IT administrators get granular visibility into each URL that is being accessed. If simple URLs like facebook.com, or profiles*.facebook.com are reported, this means that a user typed in Facebook and logged on (an intentional action). Other URLs having cdn* usually represent Facebook resources such as 'Like', 'Share' and 'Comment' content embedded in any website, even work-related. Once these URLs are identified, administrators can tweak their reports to only include the basic (intentional) URLs above. For example, administrators can add "ads.google*" or simply "ads*" to the reporting exclusion lists. The reports will then only list intentional activity such as loading the main page of Facebook and logging on.

To edit reports to add these exclusions, follow these steps:

1. Open the GFI WebMonitor configuration and go to Manager > Policies



2. Select your desired report and click on the pen 'edit' icon



3. Click on the 'Data' tab and edit accordingly:

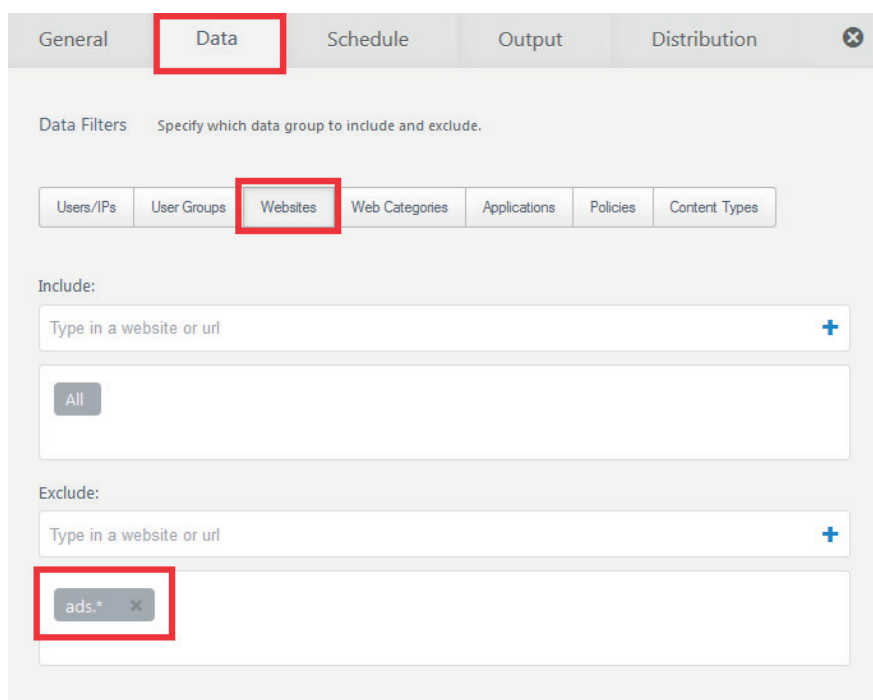


Figure 7: Excluding advertisement content from reports

4. If needed, entire content from applications can be excluded as well:

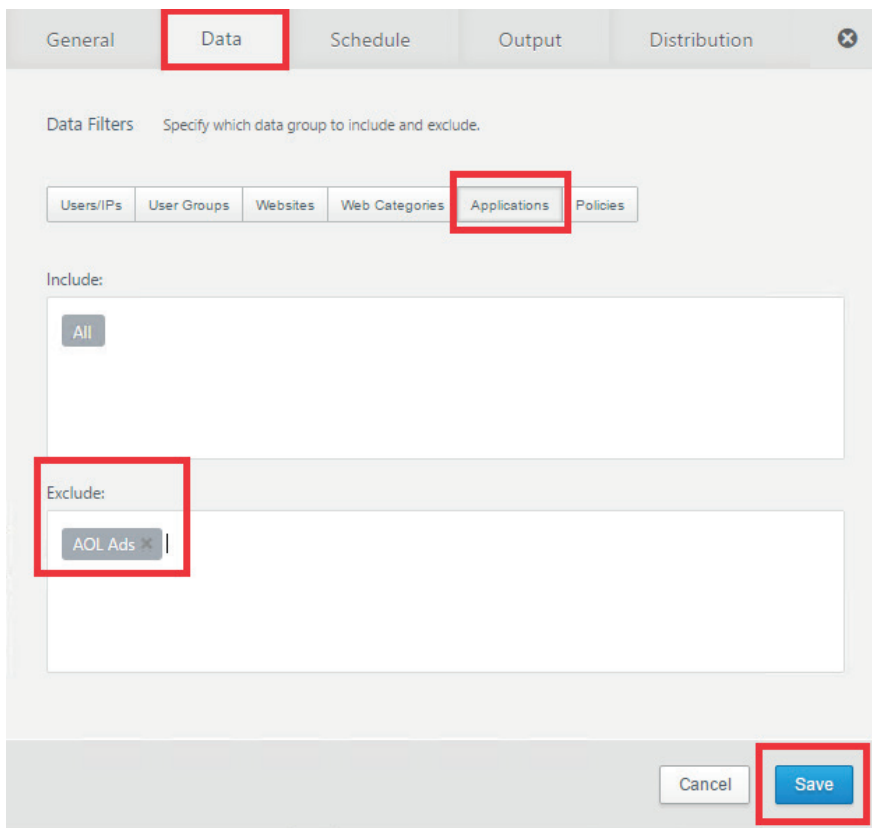


Figure 8: Excluding entire web applications from reports

Modern applications usually load content from HTML, asp(x), flash movie and other pages so administrators can further filter the report to only include those resources (while still allowing that content to be browsed). Same applies to Javascript and flash objects which are not movies.

Conclusion

Administrators need a solution whereby they can differentiate between 'noise' web requests such as advertisement and social media platform referrals and intentional site visits initiated by users. In order to achieve this, administrators must first be able to get a sense of what content is being loaded, from where and how. GFI WebMonitor enables administrators to easily discover, monitor and differentiate between web requests by leveraging its powerful and granular web filtering engine. Once administrators gain in-depth insight into what undesired content is being presented to users, and reported, they can leverage GFI WebMonitor to manage and secure all activity by blocking undesired web content as well as refining their business reports accordingly.

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