

DevCentral 4: The next generation



team, as well as other F5 partners and experts, showcasing the possibilities of F5 tools and technologies.

- ▶ Expanded Independent Software Vendor solution sections and channels, including a new Microsoft Solutions section and discussion forum.
- ▶ Extensive syndication of DevCentral content and media via RSS, to enable flexible consumption through popular RSS readers and portals.
- ▶ Optimized navigation for quick access to any information, including tag clouds that visually depict the most popular DevCentral topics.

The power of community

DevCentral is grounded in F5's philosophy that community—when encouraged to work together—drives remarkable innovation. "Social networking and Web 2.0 best practices are not gimmicks for the latest generation of consumer dot-coms," says Jeff Browning, director of product management at F5. Interaction between F5 experts and industry peers gives customers a voice to inspire new ideas and product enhancements, while providing access to a unique collection of expertise across technologies, markets, and geographies. The result is a better overall solution that the community shapes and shares collectively. To better facilitate collaboration for existing members and to reach out to new members, DC4 was redesigned to help the entire community flourish.

F5 HAS ANNOUNCED the fourth generation of its unique DevCentral community site (<http://devcentral.f5.com>). DevCentral 4 (DC4) is the only technical community for network and application professionals, evolved through participation of more than 16,000 registered users worldwide. DC4 offers new ways to learn about F5 and partner solutions, tailored to the form and content

preferences of technical professionals. Leveraging technologies like wikis, video and podcasts, blogs, and forums, it provides networking and application development tips and information. It also leverages innovative social networking functionality through Web 2.0 technologies, providing possibilities to enhance applications and F5 investments.

The new design for DC4 was based on direct feedback

from the DevCentral community. It includes expanded discussion forums, as well as new topics, new technology coverage, support for the Japanese language, and the debut of F5 Labs. F5 Labs was created to showcase and encourage innovation and breakthrough ideas.

What's new in DC4? A brief rundown

- ▶ Expanded topic sections and forums covering WAN

Optimization, SOA/Web Services, Remote Access, and Security.

- ▶ Community-building enhancements including global User Group sections, Community Feedback forums, an MVP program, and support for the growing Japanese technical community with Japanese language support.
- ▶ Sample applications created by F5's DevCentral

“What sets F5 DevCentral apart from other vendor communities is the commitment to excellence shown by F5 as a whole. It’s obvious that F5 is committed to the community; even the most senior product architects visit the discussion forums regularly to help customers innovate and solve real problems,” says Jason Rahm, a network administrator for a large transportation services company and 2005 iRules contest winner. “This commitment, combined with a worldwide community of smart users sharing great ideas about better ways to deliver applications, makes DevCentral an



invaluable resource that helps me and my company.”
“The ability to continually learn, encourage, and propagate innovation into a market often sets a company apart from competitors,” says Abner Germanow, director of enterprise networks services at IDC. “With DevCentral, F5 provides a unique forum for customers and partners to create, test, refine, and share new ways of using the network to improve application performance. IDC believes this effort is being driven by customers and partners who are on the front lines of one of the most exciting segments of IT today.”

Looking forward to deployment

Congratulations—you have made the business case for a new application and are ready for deployment planning. In all likelihood, you will front this application with an F5 BIG-IP appliance to ensure high availability and security. Now you need some help tweaking all the knobs to make the application run optimally.

Here’s good news. F5 has produced a series of Deployment Guides covering application providers like IBM Lotus, Citrix, BEA, Microsoft, Oracle, Siebel, and SAP. These guides are thorough, providing just about every possible setting needed to fine-tune these applications. And for most configurations, the fine-tuning is already done. Just choose the default settings and your application is optimized. Please visit www.f5.com/solutions/deployment to view the guides.

Further obscure those HTTP server identities

APPLICATION SERVER IDENTITIES have always been a relatively easy way to deduce what is actually serving up your application content. While this is a nice feature for most functions of application data transactions, it can also make it easy for hackers to target malicious attacks. Attacks always start by looking for the lowest-hanging fruit. Known targets are easier to attack than unknown targets. If an exploit exists against ACME’s WebServer 4.021, you need only query thousands of public web servers until you find one that responds with its unique identifier (“Server: ACME WebServer 4.021”) and you’re in.

Application fingerprinting tools take a step beyond server string reliance and evaluation. Fingerprinting is based on the logic that applications from the same family typically respond in the same way with measurable results. By knowing and understanding how an application server is going to respond in given situations, application fingerprinting tools can more reliably deduce what server is running regardless of what string values for “Server:” it reports.

Enter BIG-IP LTM and iRules. With this powerful combo, you can break the cycle of repetitive response patterns from application servers, without breaking the application or touching the back-end servers. The iRule at <http://devcentral.f5.com/Default.aspx?tabid=63&articleType=ArticleView&articleId=14> shows how you can control the manner in which protocol information is returned to the user. It also illustrates how to obscure application server identities by attempting to confuse programmatic fingerprinting tools.



Confusing any fingerprinting tool is not always easy, and not always desirable from a production standpoint. If you don’t want to notify the world that you’re running Apache 2.0/PHP 4.3.9 or IIS/6.0 with .NET 2.0.5, and want to hide this from attack reconnaissance tools, this rule shows how you can keep your website secure by further obscuring your server’s true identity.