

++++view from the top+++++ Fiscal responsibility

An application-aware network
makes financial applications sing.

ZEUS KERRAVALA is senior vice president for enterprise research at Yankee Group and an expert in network and application deployment and optimization. He spoke with F5 World's contributing writer Sandra Gittlen.

Q Does the financial sector have special network requirements that characterize that environment?

A This environment is the most demanding on the network that you'll find in any industry. Many unique applications and protocols are delivered over financial services networks. There are custom applications for everything, including broker-to-broker trading, customer-facing applications, stock quotation feeds, and other industry-specific applications.

Uptime and reliability mean everything. The price of a stock can change in a matter of a few seconds, so any delay in traffic or a prolonged outage can mean millions of dollars in lost opportunities and can require financial restitution.

Q How have recent compliance and regulatory changes impacted the financial sector?

A Compliance and regulatory changes have made financial

institutions more accountable. The institution must understand every packet that goes across the network—where it's headed, who may have intercepted it, and what may have happened to it. Every transaction has to be recorded down to the second. If not, there are criminal implications.

Accountability is very difficult because processes have been dealt with manually. I talked to one bank officer who has a whole team doing nothing but Sarbanes-Oxley compliance for a month every quarter.

F5 brings automation to help comply with these changes, which tend to come pretty fast. You need a flexible architecture that can deal with them quickly.

Q Should an IT manager working in the financial sector pay particular attention to the concept of "application awareness" as it relates to the organization's network infrastructure?

A Yes. A survey we did a few years ago shows that in the financial sector, more than 40% of downtime is caused by human error. Configuration



Automation can help with compliance, says Yankee Group's Zeus Kerravala.

changes, manual processes, and other changes can all lead to unplanned downtime. So the more you can automate and integrate application awareness and a lot of the intelligence that goes into the network, the better off you'll be.

Q How can F5 help organizations build an application-aware network infrastructure?

A For packaged applications, such as those from Microsoft and Oracle, F5 has issued application deployment guides that help IT managers deploy F5 equipment in standardized environments.

In proprietary environments, such as financial, health care, and government, it is not feasible to under-

stand all the nuances. That's where the DevCentral community, iRules, and iControl can add value.

F5 has become the facilitator for collaboration in its development community. It has created the technology and infrastructure to enable the community to develop custom solutions for the scripting language.

Q How can DevCentral, iRules, and iControl address the needs of financial institutions?

A For financial institutions, F5 provides 90% of the solution, and iRules and iControl help you customize the other 10%.

When you have a customization issue that needs to be addressed, you can post a question on DevCentral and someone with more experience can help solve that problem.

F5's DevCentral, iRules, and iControl are tools that enable administrators and users of F5 products and technologies to collaborate with one another and customize their solutions. It's kind of the MySpace of the financial community. [With DevCentral], the knowledge a person has is no longer limited to what's in his or her head; it's now available to the entire community. It's an extremely powerful tool. *