

# Success by design

F5 and enterprise applications leader SAP are working together to help customers build proven, application-ready infrastructures.



BY RICH FREEMAN

Photographs by Jen Siska

**HERE'S A** trick question: Does service-oriented architecture (SOA) make life easier or harder for IT departments?

For all too many companies, the correct answer is "both." In today's world of globe-spanning business relationships, once-autonomous organizations must now connect in real time with dozens of branch sites, partners, and customers. SOA uses open, web-based standards to make linking disparate organizations and systems dramatically simpler. But it also imposes more intense pressures on networks. SOA solutions typically employ browser-based interfaces with plugins that generate far more traffic than legacy, thick clients. That can subject companies with underpowered infrastructures to frustrating slowdowns.

What that means for business applications giant SAP, which has retooled its entire product line around a powerful new enterprise SOA platform, is that network capabilities loom larger than ever in a customer deployment's success or failure. Because of this, F5 has joined forces with SAP on a landmark effort to help SAP customers enjoy the benefits of streamlined Application Delivery Network-

ing. Working together, the two leaders in their respective fields are designing complete, optimized network infrastructures for implementations of SAP® applications—and proving that they really work.

## Low-cost risk mitigation

According to Ken Salchow, F5's manager of core technical marketing, businesses desperately want proven answers to networking challenges these days. "Our customers are asking us for prepackaged, tested, documented, and vendor-validated solutions to deploying their most critical business applications," he says. And that's just what F5 provides, he continues, through its Application Ready Networks. Every Application Ready Network includes the tools, documentation, and processes customers need to deliver solid network performance and security, unified security enforcement and access control, and seamless disaster recovery capabilities.

Sadly, those qualities are too often lacking in the networks underlying SAP solution-based implementations. Just ask SAP's Joerg Nalik. Currently the director of partner solution manage-



Ron Carovano, F5's SAP business development manager (left), and Joerg Nalik, director of partner solution management in SAP's Global Ecosystem and Partner Group, discuss F5's Application Ready Network for use with SAP applications.

company recently gave his test lab team an award for the work with network vendors. SAP decided to establish a larger, permanent facility called the Co-Innovation Lab (COIL). "We now have these great tools at hand to work with partners, customers, and network vendors like F5," Nalik observes. Included among those tools are two F5 contributions: A BIG-IP model 6800 and a FirePass model 4300. That means SAP customers can now see firsthand how F5 optimizes the network for implementations of SAP applications.

"I'm very glad that F5 decided to become a member of COIL right at the beginning," Nalik says. So is Carovano, noting that the "co-innovation" part of the COIL's name is more than empty rhetoric. "The thing that's neat about this facility is it's a place where partners can get together with SAP and create something new," he observes.

Nalik encourages SAP customers to get in on all the activity around network optimization. Membership for customers in the ES Community is free, he notes, and new infrastructure-related materials appear on the SAP Developer Network web site all the time. Suddenly, network readiness is one of SAP's hot areas of inquiry. According to Carovano, much of the credit belongs to Nalik: "He's an entrepreneur, and F5 has participated in that entrepreneurship, nourished it, and benefited from it." \*

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ment in SAP's Global Ecosystem and Partner Group, Nalik once worked in the company's field support organization, helping customers tackle performance issues. "I found time and again that remote end-user response time had nothing to do with the application servers' performance," he recalls. "Most of the time, the problem was the wide area network."

Such experiences were fresh in Nalik's mind when he joined SAP's partner unit and became active in its Enterprise Services (ES) Community, which brings customers, IT companies, and SAP employees together to swap best practices. Determined to stop poorly configured networks from hindering deployments of SAP applications, Nalik formed the ES Community's first network services advisory group in April 2006.

F5 was a charter member of the new group, which soon set about constructing a lab environment on SAP's Palo Alto, Calif., campus. The lab is equipped with a full-scale SAP solution-based installation and sophisticated performance evaluation gear. Working out of that facility, F5 engineers performed a series of tests aimed at perfecting the Application Ready Network for use with SAP applications—and the results were striking. Using BIG-IP products and other F5 technologies, testing showed, SAP customers can:

- **Cut login times over wide-area networks on the SAP NetWeaver® Portal by more than half**
- **Reduce solution-based CPU utilization on SAP application-based servers by up to 44%**
- **Execute secure document downloads 4.5x faster over DSL lines and up to 177x faster over high-bandwidth, high-latency connections**

Best of all, realizing such gains won't cost much, says Ron Carovano, F5's SAP business development manager. "Our stuff is less than 1% of the cost of the deployment

of an SAP application, but provides significantly more than that in terms of return," he notes. "If you're an IT executive getting ready to deploy SAP technology, you really want to do anything you can to mitigate risk. That's what an F5 investment does. It helps eliminate risk."

Drawing on its experiences in the SAP lab, F5 drafted a detailed guide to deploying F5 technologies together with SAP software. "By following this deployment guide, customers can do some amazing things to help ensure that their SAP applications remain secure, fast, and available," says Salchow. And that's not just F5 talking, adds Carovano. "This is all based on work done with SAP at SAP's campus," he says. The two companies have even collaborated on a joint white paper about optimizing networks for SAP solution deployments.

### More co-innovation to come

Carovano hails Nalik for driving heightened interest at SAP in Application Delivery Networking. "That was all very new for SAP," he notes. Not surprisingly, Nalik's superiors have also recognized the achievements. The

### Additional resources

**For more information about the F5 Application Ready Network for use with SAP applications, see:**

- *The ARN guide for SAP*
- *The deployment guide for SAP*
- *The webcast for SAP: Powering the New Enterprise located at [www.f5world.com](http://www.f5world.com).*