Getting a TRUE taste of application acceleration

F5 and Symphoniq deliver a clear path for optimization.

A CRITICAL FACTOR in web application adoption is having good end-user performance; another is quickly responding to issues. For instance: Is the page loading fast enough? Are database queries stalling out? Are users hitting the refresh button because the application is too slow? To that end, are end users actually *using* the application?

BY SANDRA GITTLEN

Photograph by Karen Mason Blair

Two years ago, at a meeting to discuss a potential partnership with the start-up Symphoniq Corp., it became clear to Calvin Rowland, director of business development at F5 Networks, how to answer these questions.

There in front of him, mapped out on the whiteboard, was Palo Alto, Calif.-based Symphoniq's patent-pending TRUE (The Real User Experience) technology, which enables IT managers to measure, in real time, how users respond to application behavior.

Because F5 is at the core of so many data centers, it could combine forces with Symphoniq to measure user experience. The Symphoniq team "clearly illustrated how the technology could be enhanced via an integration with the BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager (LTM) system using the unique functionality of iRules and iControl," Rowland says.

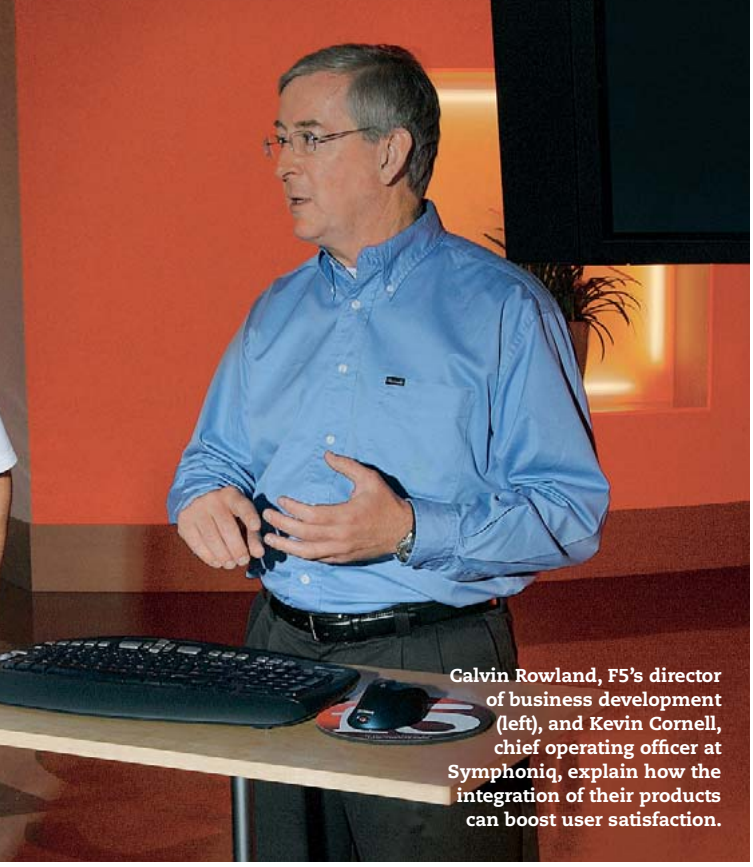
After discussing the technology further with the Symphoniq team, Rowland says he knew that a relationship with Symphoniq would be beneficial to F5 customers. "This is more than just a partnership; this is a technology alliance that produces business value. Regardless of their size, we consider this relationship to be strategic because of what it can do for our customers," he says.

What IT managers get out of the alliance is the ability to track every user transaction for acceptable performance levels. Furthermore, because the TRUE technology is fully integrated with F5 BIG-IP LTM, IT managers can quickly detect user performance problems and isolate their root cause within the infrastructure, according to Kevin Cornell, chief operating officer at Symphoniq. "Once they've pinpointed the problem, IT managers can modify the application delivery provided by F5 to respond to the situation. A slow response time may indicate a need to apply acceleration, compression, optimization, or modify the delivery algorithm," he says.

The integration of Symphoniq's TRUE technology with F5's BIG-IP solutions was made possible thanks to the openness of the iControl web service API. Through the flexibility of the open API, Symphoniq was able to complete the integration within two weeks. The resulting solution was designed to help companies better manage their web-based business-critical applications. "They are relying on a great user experience to not only validate their investment, but also to provide continuous management of the environment," Cornell says.

And Rowland agrees: "If performance is lacking, then web application adoption suffers and investments are wasted. Application response time problems need to be detected before users notice."

The integration of TRUE with BIG-IP LTM is also use-



Calvin Rowland, F5's director of business development (left), and Kevin Cornell, chief operating officer at Symphoniq, explain how the integration of their products can boost user satisfaction.

ful for IT managers who have included the user experience as a factor in their service-level agreements (SLAs) and need a way to make sure those SLAs are being met. Prior to the integration of Symphoniq's TRUE technology, F5 had to create a synthetic user environment to show customers the improvements they would experience. Once the appliance was deployed, users had to develop their own benchmarks to measure end-user response time. "It's very hard to improve what you can't measure," Rowland says.

Putting it to work

IT managers can easily install Symphoniq's TRUE technology on their BIG-IP LTM appliances, according to Cornell. "Symphoniq has taken advantage of the flexibility of F5's iRules and iControl to make this an out-of-the-box integration," he says.

Once the TRUE software is installed, an iRule deploys the TRUE software into end-user transactions to give a detailed picture—directly within the browser—of performance levels. The combination of TRUE and BIG-IP LTM can help IT managers gather information on everything from time to download files to how often a user clicks to refresh a page.

These performance metrics are fed through the BIG-IP LTM system and compared with customer-determined, acceptable performance thresholds. If the acceptable level of performance is not met, TRUE can help IT managers figure out how to restore normal performance patterns by optimizing SSL offloading, caching, and compression scenarios. The combination of solutions extends the Application Delivery Network (ADN) to help improve performance and decision making.

By monitoring real-world web application traffic, TRUE can catch things that were not noticed in a test environment, such as how multiple applications interact during a transaction. And with the single interface of BIG-IP LTM and TRUE, end-user performance is consolidated in a single console, making it easier to identify and fix any issues. "You can integrate this information into the new ControlPoint solution from F5," he says.

IT managers can also pull reports, using BIG-IP LTM and TRUE technology, to show further details about user response times. "IT groups are always looking for ways to justify costs to business units," Rowland says.

A taste of improved performance

IT managers can get a taste of TRUE during the F5 evaluation process. F5 field engineers use Symphoniq's TRUE technology to demonstrate the power of the TRUE/BIG-IP LTM combination, according to Cornell.

F5 engineers gather a baseline performance reading from a potential customer's web applications. Then they switch on the BIG-IP LTM appliance with the TRUE technology and show how much improvement is gained with acceleration techniques. TRUE highlights the problem areas and then offers suggestions to mitigate the problem, such as offloading SSL processes. "It unequivocally proves the power of F5's application acceleration," Cornell says.

For Symphoniq, the alliance with F5 is a no-brainer. "Our other option was to deploy a stand-alone Symphoniq appliance, but we're a software-only company and didn't want to get into the hardware business," Cornell says.

The start-up also didn't want to add complexity to IT networks. "This partnership allows us to streamline things for IT—one less appliance they have to manage and maintain. It's definitely easier if you can piggyback on a device that is already there," he says.

Integrating the power of both the TRUE technology and BIG-IP LTM into a single appliance enables IT teams to draw immediate benefits for the present and the future, Rowland says. They can pinpoint and resolve performance problems as soon as they arise and before the help desk phone starts ringing. They can also forecast and cost-justify infrastructure add-ons, such as servers and bandwidth, that are needed to boost application performance.

Rowland says that the pairing of the TRUE technology and BIG-IP LTM enables IT teams to achieve their ultimate goal: a high rate of application adoption by satisfied users. ✺

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SYMPHONIQ CORP. AT A GLANCE

Headquarters: Palo Alto, Calif.
Founded: 2003
Core products:
- **Symphoniq TrueView –** a comprehensive, integrated web application performance monitoring tool that enables IT managers to monitor transactions.
- **TrueView Express –** a lightweight, downloadable monitoring tool that lets IT managers track user experience in real time.

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