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Eric Blue
Network and Security Manager

AutoTrader.com Sees a 4x Bandwidth Gain, Improved Download Times and a Better WAN User Experience With F5's WANJet

Industry:

Online Automotive Classifieds

Challenges:

- Slow application response times
- Slow download times for large email attachments
- Slow file sharing off server

Solution:

F5 WANJet 400s in headquarters
F5 WANJet 200s in regional offices

Benefits:

- Internal application response time improvement
- Performance improvement for downloading large email attachments
- Improvement in file sharing performance

Overview

AutoTrader.com, created in 1997 and headquartered in Atlanta, Ga., is the Internet's leading auto classifieds marketplace and consumer information website. AutoTrader.com aggregates in a single location more than 2.8 million vehicle listings from 40,000 dealers and 250,000 private owners, which provides the largest selection of vehicles attracting more than 11 million qualified buyers each month.

AutoTrader.com has a total of eight business offices across the United States. Atlanta, GA acts as a center location (hub) for all business activities and services, including email, HTTP-based internal sales applications, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) applications, directory services, and Windows (CIFS) file sharing.

Challenge

AutoTrader.com employees at the remote offices were experiencing slow application response times. One of the major issues they faced was that e-mail attachments would sometimes take 45 seconds to a minute to download. Many times these attachments would be addressed to all of the users at that remote site, so the long download times would occur for every employee at the site, slowing productivity.

“Anything over one megabyte for an attachment was problematic,” said Eric Blue, Network and Security Manager for AutoTrader.com. “It was affecting employee efficiency. We thought about restricting employees' attachment size, but that wasn't really an option.”

Besides faster downloads for attachments, Blue and his team faced other challenges: 1) improving response times for internal employees accessing sales and CRM-based applications 2) improving file-sharing performance and 3) increasing satisfaction of employees who couldn't access or share the information they needed to efficiently perform their jobs.

Solution

After an evaluation of several products, AutoTrader.com decided to bring in F5's WANJet.

WANJet is an appliance-based solution that delivers LAN-like application performance over the WAN. WANJet accelerates file transfer, email, client server applications, data replication, and others, resulting in predictable, fast performance for all WAN users.

“We needed a product that met all of our requirements: the handling of email attachments, HTTP applications, and file sharing,” said





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The AutoTrader.com WAN environment is a fully-redundant network, consisting of 7 regional offices connected to the Atlanta headquarters via dual frame relay connections. Each site has two routers running HSRP with each WAN connection supported by a different carrier for total redundancy. In order to support this redundant environment, F5 WANJet products were placed in parallel behind the WAN routers, with the WANJets connected to each other via the peer ports. Each WANJet kept the sessions stateful, no matter which router was used for incoming our outgoing sessions.

Benefits

The results of deploying WANJet (two 400 series units in Atlanta; two 200 series units in Chesapeake, VA; with six other regional offices currently slated) were immediate:

- 4x bandwidth gain (expansion)*
- 11-to-1 compression ratio
- Improved response times of web-based applications

** Some people call it bandwidth expansion; others call it data reduction. But whatever you call it, the goal is the same: to squeeze more data through costly wide-area pipes. The basic technique is also the same: remove*

redundant bit patterns as a data stream enters the WAN and restore them as the stream exits the WAN. Done well, bandwidth expansion lets businesses support more off-site backups, handle decreasing backup windows, and even provide superior performance for redundant applications.

F5's bandwidth expansion solution for AutoTrader.com is called Transparent Data Reduction (TDR), which operates at the session layer of the OSI model. TDR examines application data streams before they merge, so it finds and removes more redundancies than layer-3 methods. TDR operates on all application data streams, and therefore optimizes significantly more types of traffic than protocol-specific, layer-7 techniques.

"We had significant bandwidth gains on the WANJet products," commented Blue. "And within a couple of days of deployment, there was a big change in user perception (of performance). We're happy with the solution."

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