



Discovery Networks Europe Deploys the BIG-IP System for Secure Traffic Management

Customer Profile

Company Name:

Discovery Networks Europe

Location:

London, England

Industry:

Television

Web site:

<http://www.discoveryeurope.com/>

Company information:

- One of Europe's largest pay-TV stables
- Broadcasting nine channel brands in 20 languages across 51 countries in Europe, Africa and the Middle East

About Discovery Networks Europe

Since its launch in the US in 1984, The Discovery Channel has grown to become a world leader in the broadcast of factual television. Ranked in the top five of most important consumer brands in last year's influential Roper report, and now broadcasting 14 Discovery branded networks around the world, Discovery is pushing the boundaries of the relationship between broadcast, Internet and interactive services.

Discovery Networks Europe, part of Discovery Communications Inc, is one of the most innovative territories within the group, pioneering the use of interactive services. Discovery Networks Europe uses F5 Traffic Management devices and Secure Socket Layer (SSL) technology to power innovative interactive TV

Executive Summary

The Discovery® Channel wanted to securely manage real-time data and credit card transactions from their viewers using the Sky digital TV satellite network. A software application that offered viewers information, quizzes and online shopping was managed and secured using F5 Networks BIG-IP® device for load balancing, Secure Socket Layer (SSL) encryption and content management. This allowed scalability during peak viewing periods, allowed application servers to be taken offline without loss of service, simplified operations by integrating load balancing with SSL, and improved performance over software only solutions without degradation in server performance during the high volume periods.

Challenge

In 2001, Discovery Networks Europe launched enhanced television services on the Sky Digital platform, allowing viewers to interact with the program content more deeply and explore additional information at points that were of most interest to them - without ever leaving the main program.

In June 2002, to coincide with the launch of the Crocodile Hunter movie, Discovery launched a theme week that included a series of prize competitions and theme toys for viewers to buy.

As Guido Bozward, Business Analyst at Discovery Networks Europe explained, "Our interactive service has been up and running for almost two years now. To date we have been very successful in using this technology to enhance the viewer experience."

"The next stage of development for our interactive service was to enable T-Commerce. Working with various business units we identified 'Croc' week as the ideal vehicle to allow credit card purchases of limited edition action figure dolls. We had about 4 weeks from the time we green light the project to transmission so we had to come up with a solution pretty quickly."

Several years back, Discovery Networks Europe had purchased a redundant pair of F5 Networks BIG-IP 540 appliances to handle its traffic management requirements. As an existing customer, Bozward contacted F5 for advice and after consultation recommended Pandi, an integration partner with experience in designing secure transaction systems.

Solution

"We met with Pandi and looked at the options available. A hardware-based SSL upgrade to our BIG-IP traffic managers looked like a solution that would allow us to securely process credit card details and maintain the optimal performance of our servers," said Bozward.

Security

Bozward's team created an order processing system that is uploaded into the sky set-top digital box via the broadcast stream whenever a consumer presses the buy button. Once a viewer enters their order and credit card details, the information is then sent in a secure format to Sky's OpenTV data processing centre via a direct dial modem within the set-top box.

The OpenTV data center then sends an SSL encrypted message to Discovery's data center which then load balances the request using a BIG-IP



540 traffic management appliance with a built-in SSL processing to decrypt the details before they are passed onto the transaction processing servers.

Bozward said, "We already used a pair of BIG-IP 540 appliances for traffic management and load balancing and it made both financial and performance sense to upgrade to SSL within the BIG-IP traffic manager. It took three weeks from when we first contacted F5 to the day when the Pandi and F5 engineers turned up, installed, configured and tested the SSL system."

High Performance

Discovery Networks Europe now has the capability to allow viewers to buy items directly from onscreen within a completely safe system. At no point does any data pass over an indirect connection without high security SSL encryption. The pair of BIG-IP appliances also allows Discovery to power its onscreen quizzes, competitions, features and games with the option of SSL encryption available on demand without any degradation on server performance.

Customer Service

"What surprised us was the speed at which everything happened. We had considered a separate SSL solution but by integrating it within our load balancer and traffic management hardware we have reduced both the complexity and eased our management workload.

"F5 were helpful and did what they said they would do within a short time frame... we would definitely work with them again," Bozward added.

About F5

As the pioneer and global leader in Application Traffic Management, F5 continues to lead the industry by driving more intelligence into the network to deliver advanced application agility. F5 products ensure the secure and optimized delivery of applications to any user - anywhere. Through its flexible and cohesive architecture, F5 delivers unmatched value by dramatically improving the way organizations serve their employees, customers and constituents, while lowering operational costs.