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> Neil Manning, Head of IT Security and Infrastructure, FNZ

Financial Services Provider FNZ Invests in Future Prosperity with a Solid Network Foundation from F5

Founded just four years ago, **FNZ** of Wellington, New Zealand, operates the financial services industry's most complete third-party, online account management service. Called a "wrap" platform, FNZ's technology enables investors and brokers to manage an entire portfolio through a single portal.

Banks, securities firms, and insurers—including heavyweights such as Bank of New Zealand and the UK's Standard Life plc—use customized versions of FNZ's infrastructure in place of building their own. According to FNZ CEO Adrian Durham, FNZ is the only company that provides all of the necessary software and hosting and handles back-end trading and settlement as well.

Today some 110,000 investors in the United Kingdom and New Zealand count on FNZ-powered websites for help in planning their financial future. Serving so many people might have been impossible had FNZ not done some advance planning of its own. Thanks in part to F5® BIG-IP® products and other F5 solutions, the company equipped itself from the outset to supply an expanding customer base with fast, reliable, and secure access to financial data.

Business Challenges

FNZ's wrap platform originated as a custom solution developed by the Wellington-based investment bank and brokerage house, First NZ Capital Ltd., for its own use. Launched six years ago, the system was an instant hit, and before long company executives realized that it might be equally popular with other financial institutions looking to introduce wrap offerings of their own.

First NZ Capital turned its wrap division into a wrap services outsourcer, which it eventually spun off as FNZ. Job one for the new business was bolstering its infrastructure to support hundreds of banking, securities, and insurance companies. FNZ knew that such organizations would insist on robust performance, as few investors have patience for a sluggish website.

Overview

Industry
Financial Services

Challenges
· Deliver excellent online user performance
· Provide 24/7 uptime for online clients
· Eliminate security vulnerabilities
· Establish a highly scalable infrastructure to support growth

Solution
· BIG-IP Global Traffic Manager
· BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager
· BIG-IP Link Controller
· BIG-IP Application Security Manager
· FirePass SSL VPN
· WANJet

Benefits
· High performance and availability
· Simplified and seamless management
· Security risks mitigated
· Infrastructure prepared to support ambitious worldwide expansion

"It has to be fast or they won't use it," says Damian Millin, FNZ's Chief Operating Officer. Moreover, consumers demand 24/7 access to their accounts, so maintaining continuous uptime would also be critical. "If the system is down for any period, we're in trouble," Millin observes.

Solution

Millin tasked Neil Manning, FNZ's Head of IT Security and Infrastructure, with preparing the company's wrap systems for wider commercial usage. Manning quickly turned to F5's BIG-IP products for help. "It became obvious early on that we would need better load balancing," he recalls. Plus, he used to work for one of F5's top New Zealand resellers, so he was familiar with the impact F5 products can have on performance and reliability.

Today, Manning uses BIG-IP products in a variety of roles. BIG-IP® Local Traffic Manager™ (LTM) Application Delivery Controller helps him keep response times down by distributing traffic evenly across FNZ's web servers. The BIG-IP® Global Traffic Manager™ (GTM) device helps him maintain nonstop uptime by enabling seamless failover among FNZ's four data centers in New Zealand and Scotland.

The BIG-IP® Link Controller™ product module prevents slow or severed ISP connections from inconveniencing customers. "If an ISP wants to do some major work on their network, we just shut them down and all of the traffic flows on the other ISPs," Manning says.

As further needs arose, FNZ also implemented the BIG-IP® Application Security Manager™ (ASM) product module as well as the FirePass® SSL VPN and WANJet® appliances to round out a complete, forward-looking Application Delivery Networking system.

Benefits

Together, all of those F5 products have dramatically simplified the challenging task of maintaining high reliability during rapid expansion on multiple continents. "It's a seamless solution that we don't have to play around with," says Manning.

One-Step Risk Mitigation

Of course, in the financial services industry, security is every bit as big a concern as availability. "It is absolutely critical," says Durham. "If we had a single case where anyone's personal information became accessible to somebody who shouldn't see it, I believe we'd basically be out of business."

Not surprisingly, then, when a routine security audit early in FNZ's history revealed a number of vulnerabilities common to financial websites, Manning acted quickly. At the time, the company was in the midst of a furious growth spurt.

"We were building websites at a phenomenal rate, two or three a month," Manning says. Reassigning developers to security-related chores would put the brakes on that work.

Instead, Manning installed BIG-IP Application Security Manager, a web application firewall that keeps all but anticipated and authorized Internet transactions outside a company's defensive perimeter.

The payoff was immediate. Thanks to BIG-IP ASM, none of the previously detected weaknesses showed up in FNZ's next audit. "We know there are some vulnerabilities in the website, but to fix the code is a huge cost," Manning observes. "To put BIG-IP ASM in front of the site and have it mitigate our risk makes my life a lot easier."

BIG-IP ASM detailed transaction logs also expose threats that would be difficult to see otherwise, helping FNZ identify and block potential hackers before they can damage the company's sites.

Companywide Standard

FNZ's experiences with BIG-IP products have inspired them to deploy additional F5 solutions. The company now uses WANJet, F5's wide-area network optimization appliance, to accelerate traffic flows—and encrypt them as well. "Lots of our traffic is confidential. [WANJet] gives us that extra level of security," Manning says.

FNZ also uses F5's FirePass SSL VPN appliance to help employees working offsite securely connect with network resources back at headquarters.

Today, in fact, F5 solutions are FNZ's companywide standard for Application Delivery Networking. "Out of all the vendors I deal with, F5 [is] probably the most responsive," Manning says. "The sales team in New Zealand has always been very proactive in helping us solve problems."

Matthew Moore, an F5 senior pre-sales engineer who supports FNZ, hails the company for being equally proactive. "Right from the start, they have always taken the long view when making architectural decisions. They used a lot of foresight and really built a foundation that enabled them to grow," Moore says.

Good thing, too, because FNZ has ambitious plans for continued expansion in Europe, Canada, and Asia. "Our aim is to get this product out to as many people as we can as fast as we can," says Millin. That means FNZ's core applications can expect rising workloads for years to come.

"Every 12 months we'll need to double the number of transactions [we process]," Millin predicts. Thanks to the BIG-IP system and other F5 solutions, he continues, FNZ's infrastructure is up to the challenge.

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