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David Neumann
Information Systems Specialist
Graef, Anhalt, Schloemer & Associates

Engineering Firm Improves Collaboration, Lowers Travel Costs, Boosts Bandwidth by 230 Percent using F5 WANJet

Industry

Engineering

Challenges

- Rapid growth
- Need to collaborate between offices
- Inability to effectively share large design files

Solution

F5® WANJet

Benefits

- Bandwidth increased by 230 percent
- Improved collaboration yields increased competitiveness
- Reduced travel costs
- Up to \$5,000 monthly productivity savings
- Ability to move forward with stalled projects

Overview

Graef, Anhalt, Schloemer & Associates (GASAI) is a fast-growing engineering firm whose far-flung employees need to combine talent to take on complex projects. However, exchanging large design files over the wide-area network was so excruciatingly slow that it was easier to fly people around the country to collaborate on projects. Since installing several F5 WANJet® WAN optimization appliances, employees have been able to swap files with ease, and GASAI has significantly reduced travel costs. The company’s bandwidth has skyrocketed 230 percent, enabling GASAI to move forward with backlogged efficiency projects.

Challenges

Graef, Anhalt, Schloemer & Associates (GASAI) is a leading U.S. engineering consulting firm with expertise in structural, civil, and transportation engineering and environmental services. Founded in 1961, GASAI has approximately 325 employees located in eight offices, in Wisconsin, Illinois, Arizona, and Florida.

The company’s great success had led to rapid growth and a subsequent strain on the company’s Wide Area Network (WAN). All applications are housed in the central Milwaukee, Wisconsin, data center, with all Internet traffic routed over T1 lines through a Milwaukee-based proxy server. “We have many different specialties

and divisions and don’t always have all the needed resources for a job in one office,” explains David Neumann, Information Systems Specialist for Graef, Anhalt, Schloemer & Associates. “We have a lot of collaboration going on between offices, but our network bandwidth was a roadblock.”

Designers would send huge binary design files ranging in size from 10 to 150 megabytes (MB) over the WAN. “Trying to open these files over the WAN was terrible, but making changes was even worse,” Neumann says. “Changes involved such lengthy delays that an iterative process that normally took two to three hours would take an entire day. It was easier to just fly the person to the other office for a couple of weeks to do the work.”

However, travel costs mounted, as did employee frustration at being away from home and leaving behind other projects in their home office. “We wanted to empower our users to work remotely in a way that was cost-effective and would support a centralized data strategy,” Neumann says.

Solution

The GASAI IT staff realized that it had two options for improving its WAN bandwidth: purchase application acceleration appliances or increase the bandwidth in each branch office. “Adding new T1 lines would provide exponential cost increases that would never go



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away,” Neumann says. So, GASAI set about evaluating acceleration appliances from three vendors.

In the end, the company selected the F5 WANJet® WAN optimization appliance because of its core TDR and TCP optimization feature set and price. “F5 uses a data optimization approach that is well suited to our needs,” Neumann says. “WANJet prioritizes and accelerates traffic in a protocol-independent manner, which allows us to accelerate targeted traffic. Other vendors make you pay for a host of protocol-specific acceleration features even if you don’t need them, which makes those products more expensive. As a result, the F5 solution cost about \$30,000 less.”

GASAI purchased seven WANJet appliances with the goal of staging the deployments in the GASAI network. F5 assisted with deployment, installing three accelerators in three branch offices for a 45-day trial. “F5 offered a much friendlier and more customer-facing attitude than the other companies and helped us with pre-planning, installation, and operational readiness,” Neumann says. “Once we were satisfied that it would meet our needs, the implementation was rapid.”

Benefits

Since adding the initial three F5 WANJet appliances to its network, GASAI has watched its WAN bandwidth jump a whopping 230 percent. With employees able to

effectively collaborate on engineering drawings over the WAN, GASAI has been able to reduce travel costs significantly and save between \$3,000 and \$5,000 each month in employee time.

Bandwidth Increased by 230 Percent

After installing WANJet application accelerators, GASAI realized a 230 percent improvement in WAN bandwidth. Once all seven appliances were installed, the company expects to see even more dramatic improvements. “When employees make changes to large files across the network, the delay is barely perceptible; it’s almost like working on them locally,” Neumann says.

Improved Collaboration Yields Increased Competitiveness

With GASAI employees able to collaborate so much more easily, the company has been able to take on jobs that leverage the resources and skills in multiple offices. “Having WANJet optimizers has definitely increased our competitiveness, because we’re able to more easily take on jobs that require the talents of staff in multiple offices,” Neumann says. “When we had only deployed the first three WANJet appliances, I had other offices calling and begging me to turn on their WANJets. That’s how significant and noticeable the performance gains have been.”

Reduced Travel Costs

GASAI no longer needs to fly people from office to office for weeks at a time to complete projects. Each such trip between Milwaukee and Phoenix—the company’s newest office—cost

GASAI approximately \$3,500. Eliminating most of these trips has significantly reduced travel costs. “An important related benefit is increased employee satisfaction at being able to stay home rather than living out of a hotel for weeks at a time,” Neumann says.

\$3,000 to \$5,000-per-month Productivity Savings

GASAI has realized a significant return on investment from its WANJet purchase. “We estimate that our employees are saving 8 to 10 hours per week due to the productivity improvements delivered by WANJet,” Neumann says. “That time is valued at \$3,000 to \$5,000 per month to us; that’s time that employees can devote to solving problems and creating solutions rather than waiting on the network to respond.”

Ability to Move Forward with Stalled Projects

With network bandwidth unclogged, GASAI has been able to proceed with stalled projects such as centralizing its tape backups and implementing data replication. “We put off implementing these other efficiency projects for fear of worsening our bandwidth issues,” Neumann says. “But having the WANJet optimizers in place has empowered us to move forward with these additional efficiency initiatives that will make our company more secure and effective.”

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