



“We operate around the globe and can’t tolerate downtime—we need immediate failover support. The F5 solution gives me that extra insurance and peace of mind.”

Craig Wheeler, Director of System Development and Information Services, Marine Resources Group

Marine Resources Group Ensures 24/7 Availability with Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 and F5

Marine Resources Group (MRG), located in Seattle, Washington, was established in 2000 as a holding and support company for investments in tug, barge, and ancillary marine services companies. MRG has the largest and most capable coastal tug and barge fleet in the U.S.

MRG companies operate around the globe, providing a wide range of marine transportation services to customers in a variety of industries. Operating companies include Foss Maritime, Constellation Maritime, America Cargo Transport, Hawaiian Tug & Barge, Young Brothers Ltd., Mercosur Shuttle Group, and AMNAV.

Email is a critical application for all MRG companies, and with 1,600+ employees working around the clock, around the globe, and on land and sea, email is the vital communication link that keeps the organization connected.

Business Challenges

MRG’s growth through acquisitions resulted in multiple, disparate email systems, which was a technology management nightmare and prevented the rollout of integrated communication and collaboration services. With more than 1,000 users and a huge email storage demand, MRG needed a robust solution that could scale effectively. MRG was running Microsoft® Exchange 2003 servers, and also had POP and Linux

email systems. It was clear that consolidating to a single, unified email communications platform was an absolute necessity.

“Our people have to be online wherever they are, because we always have ‘business hours’ somewhere in the world,” said Craig Wheeler, MRG Director of Systems Development and Information Services. Employees stay connected using laptops, BlackBerry® devices, air cards, and VPN.

Overview

Industry

Maritime Transportation

Challenges

- Eliminate management, cost, and communication issues caused by multiple disparate email systems
- Ensure complete failover and disaster recovery

Solution

- F5 Application Ready Solution for Microsoft Exchange Server 2007
- BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager v10

Benefits

- High availability for users globally
- Mitigated risk with system redundancy
- Consolidation of 7 email systems to one Exchange Server 2007 system
- Reduced operating costs and streamlined support

Partner

Azaleos



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MRG selected Microsoft® Exchange Server 2007 as the cornerstone of the email consolidation strategy. Exchange Server 2007 provides email, calendar, contacts, and task scheduling, with support for web-based and mobile access to information.

Consolidating to one platform was not the only part of the plan, however. Wheeler was thinking of the future, and how to manage, monitor, and protect the system with email architecture, email archiving, and disaster recovery—so that IT resources could be put to better use.

Solution

Wheeler turned to Azaleos Corporation, a Seattle, Washington-based company that provides comprehensive maintenance and management solutions to simplify Microsoft Exchange for large enterprise customers. Azaleos currently has Exchange email services deployed for customers with users located in the U.S., Canada, Europe, Latin America, South America, Asia, and Australia.

Using Microsoft best practices, Azaleos was able to quickly deploy Exchange Server 2007. This makes it possible for an experienced person to take over daily management and enables email to function as a utility that is always available, 24/7. Scott Gode, Vice President of Marketing and Product Management for Azaleos, noted that in addition to its ability to deploy MRG's new email environment, MRG turned to Azaleos for its Exchange management expertise.

According to Wheeler, "When Azaleos began working on the installation of Microsoft Exchange Server, they asked, 'What is your load balancing solution?' I said 'We don't have one.'"

Azaleos immediately recommended F5. "We took their advice," said Wheeler. "We realized we could not afford downtime

and the F5 solution would help us. Our management travels around the world, and email is critical."

F5's comprehensive Application Ready Solution (ARS) for Exchange Server enables organizations to provide advanced performance, security, and availability, to ensure maximum ROI for Exchange Server deployments with the minimum amount of effort. F5 BIG-IP® Local Traffic Manager™ (LTM) is an intelligent, adaptable solution to secure, optimize, and deliver applications without fail.

For Wheeler, immediate failover was key to the Exchange Server solution. "We wanted the ability to automatically switch from one server to another in the event of failure, so we added load balancing with two sets of mail servers to support our users," he said. BIG-IP LTM load balances across servers in a single data center. To provide an added level of reliability, dual site replication for email disaster recovery is planned for the near future.

F5 provides a vital component of a larger solution for MRG. The BIG-IP® version 10 system uses profiles to enhance control over managing network traffic, and makes traffic management tasks easier and more efficient.

"The F5 solution was crucial to the success of implementing Exchange 2007 in a load balanced environment at MRG," noted Gode. "Given the unique architecture of the MRG system, it was important to be able to include the kind of robust performance and availability options that the F5 hardware delivers when optimized with Exchange."

Benefits

MRG is realizing the benefits of the new solutions every day. Not only is the company streamlining tasks and staffing, they are gaining operational efficiency.

"We went from four Exchange 2003 servers plus several POP mail providers to Exchange 2007, and now we have a single global address book and shared calendar access," noted Wheeler. What used to be four separate BlackBerry® Enterprise Servers (BES) are now consolidated to a single BES.

Wheeler says that a key element for MRG is that many of their vessels were running simple POP email clients. "Now with an Exchange back-end, we can run a rich Microsoft® Outlook® client on the boats and have an offline/cached email experience," he said.

By consolidating seven disparate systems to a single enterprise Exchange Server 2007 email system, MRG has reduced support expenses, improved operational efficiency, and positioned the company for the future.

"We're doing more with less, and the model that works for MRG is to outsource Exchange operations to Azaleos," Wheeler added. "We own the servers, equipment and the F5 box, but Azaleos handles 24/7 monitoring, management, support, and proprietary archiving for us."

One of the biggest benefits realized by MRG is peace of mind—knowing the system is working and is very unlikely to fail.

With the F5 Application Ready Solution, MRG benefits from high availability of its applications around the clock. "We operate around the globe and we can't tolerate downtime—we need immediate failover support. Our people need email access at all times, and the F5 solution gives me that extra insurance and peace of mind," said Wheeler.

"With these solutions, I don't even have to think about Exchange," said Wheeler. With F5 in place, there is redundancy in the system and a mitigation of risk. "It's one less thing to go wrong," he added.

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