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Doug Shore, Director of Operations, msnbc.com

## Msnbc.com Shatters Site Traffic Records, Ensures Availability with F5 Products

Election Day 2008 was a long-awaited culmination of an historical political competition. With many news venues vying for viewership, msnbc.com’s expansive coverage resulted in nearly 250 million page views\*—nearly double the traffic msnbc.com experienced on Election Day 2004. To support this increase, the company relied on devices from F5 Networks® to manage site traffic and ensure high availability despite unprecedented traffic volume.

### Business Challenges

Msnbc.com, a leading online news organization, is the official online destination for the entire NBC News family, featuring content from “Today,” “NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams,” “Dateline NBC,” “Meet the Press,” NBC Sports, and MSNBC TV. Based in Redmond, Wash., msnbc.com is a joint venture of Microsoft and NBC Universal.

With more news consumers turning to the Internet for timely information, msnbc.com vies for viewership with other media heavyweights, including Yahoo! News, CNN Digital Network, AOL News, NYTimes.com, and Fox News Digital Network. To attract and retain viewers, msnbc.com delivers a diverse range of stories with world-class reporting, multimedia features,

and interactive tools that enable viewers to voice opinions and customize site content to meet their needs.

But compelling content is only part of the equation when it comes to winning viewers. Doug Shore, Director of Operations at msnbc.com says, “The other part is site availability. People are not going to stay on our site or return to our site if performance is slow or a page is unavailable. There are many other news sites they can go to.” On Election Day 2008, competition among the leading online news sites was fierce, and maintaining high availability for msnbc.com was imperative, as losing viewers to other news sites was the consequence of poor site performance.

### Overview

#### Industry

Multimedia News and Information Services

#### Challenges

- Handle heavy traffic volumes
- Ensure high availability for website

#### Solutions

- BIG-IP Global Traffic Manager 1500
- BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager 6800

#### Benefits

- Seamless content delivery
- Higher viewer loyalty
- Strong partnership

## Solution

Msnbc.com relied on its award-winning content, and a server infrastructure that could handle heavy traffic volumes, to provide viewers with a top-notch experience on the day of the election.

The company delivers news from web servers located at two data centers, with an additional data center on the East Coast for redundancy. Devices from F5 manage traffic among data centers and among individual servers at each data center location. Msnbc.com uses three BIG-IP® Global Traffic Manager™ (GTM) 1500 devices, one at each of its data centers, to load balance traffic among locations. At each data center, two BIG-IP® Local Traffic Manager™ (LTM) 6800 devices sit in front of a web server, load balancing traffic among individual servers. Content delivery for the site's RSS feeds, blogs, and media domain is also augmented by a third-party content delivery network (CDN)—and such was the case on Election Day 2008.

On an average day, approximately 800 megabytes to 1.2 gigabits (g) of traffic per second travels through the BIG-IP devices to both data centers. On November 4, 2008, msnbc.com experienced 2g of traffic per second to both data centers. Maximum capacity for both data centers combined is 4g per second (Gbps). "But we've pushed the F5 devices to near maximum capacity in the past, as high as 3.8 Gbps, without the CDN," says Shore. "They've been extremely steady for us in any breaking news situation."

With nearly 250 million page views and more than 20 million unique viewers,\* November 4, 2008 was by far the news provider's highest traffic day in its 12-year online history.

## Benefits

Msnbc.com relies on F5 devices to manage

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traffic and ensure uninterrupted delivery of content. With better availability for its content, the online news organization attracts larger numbers of loyal viewers. Msnbc.com has enjoyed strong support from F5 since 2000.

### Seamless content delivery

BIG-IP devices help msnbc.com route traffic to the right resources. BIG-IP GTM distributes traffic according to data center and network conditions, to deliver the best website performance to the viewer. And, because BIG-IP LTM is capable of inspecting and responding to any server or web application error, "we can seamlessly reroute traffic in the event that a user encounters an issue on the network," says Shore. Msnbc.com experienced 100 percent site availability on Election Day. The highest peak in site traffic happened during prime time television hours. "There were 20 million viewers watching NBC News broadcasts, and 20 million viewers accessing msnbc.com. This speaks volumes about where people are going for news today."

### Higher viewer loyalty

Msnbc.com not only had the highest number of viewers, these viewers also spent more time on msnbc.com than on other news sites. According to Nielsen Online, msnbc.com was number one in total minutes and time spent per person, with 13.5 minutes spent per user compared to 10.5 minutes per user

for CNN.com.\*\* "We're always trying to improve," says Shore. "The BIG-IP LTMs and GTMs have helped us in the challenge to win viewers over."

### Strong partnership

On Election Day 2008, F5 engineers were standing by in case the msnbc.com network experienced any issues, but, says Shore, "We didn't need to use the hotline because the F5 devices performed flawlessly." Shore attributes the network's success largely to the expertise and hard work of msnbc.com engineers, but also to "working with F5. The company is always very responsive to our needs, having helped us boost availability and provide a better experience for users since we first started using F5 devices in 2000."

\*Source: Omniture SiteCatalyst

\*\*Source: Nielsen Online: Netview

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