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Steven Opstaele, Chief Infrastructure Architect at NorthgateArinso

NorthgateArinso Uses F5 BIG-IP Solutions to Secure and Accelerate HR Web Applications

NorthgateArinso focuses on helping human resources (HR) executives optimise service delivery through smarter processes and more efficient technologies. To achieve this, NorthgateArinso supports key HR areas like workforce administration, payroll, benefits, recruitment, learning, and talent management. The company has developed its own euHReka HR services platform, offered in 50 countries and in 24 languages. euHReka is a multi-tenant application largely based on the SAP ERP platform. The company’s outsourced and on-demand HR services have very demanding response time and availability goals in order to meet customer service level agreements (SLAs). NorthgateArinso turned to F5 to provide safe access and traffic management technology to enable optimum system performance.

Business Challenge

NorthgateArinso was created in 2007 following the acquisition of ARINSO International by Northgate Information Solutions. The combination of both entities resulted in a global human resources leader with more than half a century of HR expertise.

The Internet has become one of the major channels through which NorthgateArinso delivers its services. A high-tech virtualized data centre in Brussels, Belgium, plays a pivotal role in offering worldwide customers—such as Cadbury and AstraZeneca—on-

demand user access to software and services. Additional regional centres in the U.S. and Asia ensure that customers in these regions have fast access to data.

“In the course of time, more and more customers asked us to provide our services through the Internet,” says Steve Vereecke, Chief Technical Officer at NorthgateArinso. “This avoids the need for expensive leased lines, allowing use of their Internet connection as a cost-effective alternative. In response to this need we created a new, shared platform—euHReka—for web-

Overview

Industry

HR business solutions

Challenges

- Provide secure web application access
- Improve application response times for a global customer base

Solution

- BIG-IP® Local Traffic Manager™
- BIG-IP® Application Security Manager™
- BIG-IP® Global Traffic Manager™
- Enterprise Manager™

Benefits

- Unified management
- Easy configuration of security through use of iRules™
- Improved service delivery
- Consolidated hardware infrastructure

Partner

Verizon Business Services



based services, as well as a new front end to provide access to our systems. Within this shared environment, all traffic is handled via the Internet."

One of the main concerns of customers was the level of application security. HR-related data must always be kept confidential. The Internet may be cost-effective compared to leased lines, but customers cannot allow HR data to be compromised. To address this issue, NorthgateArinso examined various methods for providing this peace of mind without compromising performance.

Solution

Initially, NorthgateArinso focused mainly on security issues, with the emphasis on intrusion detection. Optimisation was added as a requirement shortly down the line.

Steven Opstaele, Chief Infrastructure Architect at NorthgateArinso, says, "After we specced out our objectives, it became clear that BIG-IP solutions were the most flexible and best able to meet our requirements for performance and web security. F5's direct competitors either missed specific features we needed, or were not able to provide a global solution. For example, both Citrix and Cisco miss the flexibility that F5's iRules control language offers."

F5's powerful graphical user interface (GUI) facilitated easy implementation of new security features and roll-out of new web services.

"We were especially happy with Enterprise Manager, which allows unified management from one location," says Opstaele. "Also, F5's iRules control language makes it very easy to configure the device for optimum web security. iRules is used to adapt HTTP header variables, perform redirections, integrate multiple applications behind one

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entry point, enforce restrictions on IP level, and enforce restrictions based on group memberships."

Benefit

Implementing BIG-IP solutions has enabled NorthgateArinso to significantly speed up its service delivery. "Before, it could take quite a while to get a new customer up and running—sometimes days," says Vereecke. "Typically, this required new hardware and a new, separate, firewall, all of which had to be configured. Today, customers are serviced through a highly scalable and shared SAP platform. All traffic is routed via the BIG-IP system, which provides security, routing, fast caching, compression, and acceleration all on a single system which, in turn, reduces complexity. Because it is a single-platform, single-interface system, we've also benefited from hardware consolidation and therefore cost savings, as the need for many separate devices is removed."

"It is now possible to connect a new client very quickly—in a matter of hours," Opstaele adds. "This is especially useful when a customer wants a demo of our system. We can get them live very quickly and securely. F5's reputation in the market has actually been helpful; F5 is well-known by our customers as a reliable security solution."

Since the F5 implementation in early 2009 by F5 partner Verizon Business Services,

NorthgateArinso has deployed F5 devices in data centres in the U.S. and Asia. These data centres provide caching of dynamic data from the Belgian database in order to reduce regional latency. The effects of latency are dependent on the application, the location, and the browser. Using F5 to accelerate cached content, round trip times have been cut by 80 to 200 milliseconds, depending on location.

"If the customer is still not satisfied, we switch to a public content delivery network (CDN), which is even closer to the end-user than our data centres," says Opstaele. "However, that CDN will still go through the F5 device to connect to the application, so security is not compromised. All in all, we can now offer customers a highly reliable and secure web platform, which is an important factor for future success."

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