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Steve Diggory, Technology Manager, PersonalizationMall.com

PersonalizationMall.com Ensures Fast, Reliable Remote Access with BIG-IP Edge Gateway

PersonalizationMall.com, founded in 1998, makes personalized gift buying quick and easy for customers. PersonalizationMall.com has seen tremendous growth, achieving \$50 million in annual sales, and recently consolidating in a 120,000 square foot manufacturing facility in Woodridge, Illinois. PersonalizationMall.com employs 200 full-time staff, adding up to 500 during peak seasons.

The retail industry is demanding and highly competitive, and the company executives and IT staff require reliable and fast remote access to stay in constant touch with the business. The current technology was holding them back, so the IT team turned to F5 and its BIG-IP Edge Gateway technology to ensure fast, reliable remote access.

Business Challenges

An innovative online retailer, PersonalizationMall.com has always had a strong technology strategy. “Our philosophy is to stay on the bleeding edge,” explains Steve Diggory, Technology Manager, PersonalizationMall.com. For example, the company was an early adopter of Microsoft Windows 7, and it has embraced 64-bit technology.

The IT team and company president have daily remote access needs. “Our executives travel to gift shows and events, and they need reliable remote access on

the road,” says Diggory. “We started seeing limitations that affected our ability to conduct business.” For many years, PersonalizationMall.com used a Cisco VPN solution. But as more employees required remote access, the Cisco technology no longer delivered acceptable performance.

Challenges became especially evident after the company migrated to Windows 7. Mobile users needed the 64-bit operating system but were unable to connect to the VPN. Another concern was the slow connection speed between office and

Overview

Industry

E-commerce

Challenges

- Improve remote user experience with added security
- Ensure 24x7 access to VPN
- Solve dropped call issues on VoIP
- Reduce downtime with easy deployment

Solution

- BIG-IP® Edge Gateway™
- BIG-IP® Local Traffic Manager™
- BIG-IP® Global Traffic Manager™

Benefits

- Improved remote application performance
- Achieved greater VoIP reliability
- Improved security and access policies
- Saved time with fast, painless deployment

home, which was limited by the older VPN technology. “We didn’t have nearly the application performance users needed, resulting in a lot of heartache trying to transfer files and data,” adds Diggory.

Users were also experiencing difficulties with dropped calls on VoIP, which was frustrating and negatively affected the business.

“Cisco was not keeping up with Microsoft technology, specifically around the 64-bit operating system. Their solution was to suggest we purchase new products,” says Diggory. To add the upgrades that Cisco proposed, PersonalizationMall.com faced a considerable investment. He continues, “It would have been costly to replace existing firewalls, so we needed a solution that worked and made better financial sense.” That turned out to be F5.

Solution

PersonalizationMall.com hosts its website on premises, and it started using F5 BIG-IP solutions to manage website traffic, which traditionally spikes with seasonal activities. To ensure a fast, seamless customer experience, IT implemented F5 BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager (LTM) Application Delivery Controller for load balancing, and BIG-IP Global Traffic Manager (GTM) to intelligently manage traffic across data centers. “That really took some of the workload off the web servers and improved customer experience,” says Diggory. “If our site was slow, people wouldn’t stay. To build and retain the customer base, we had to keep our site in top form—and BIG-IP technology helped us do that.”

With the success of BIG-IP LTM and BIG-IP GTM, Diggory researched solutions for VPN issues and learned about F5 BIG-IP Edge Gateway, an advanced access solution that brings together SSL VPN remote access, security, application acceleration, and availability services for remote users. It provides context-aware, policy-controlled, secure remote access to applications at LAN speed. With BIG-IP Edge Gateway,

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organizations can deliver peak performance levels to users who are accessing business-critical applications across the WAN.

To provide this kind of capability using other vendors’ solutions would require adding multiple controllers and boxes in the data center—representing an initial capital outlay and continual costs for updates and maintenance. With BIG-IP Edge Gateway, all of this functionality is built right in, delivering a platform of combined services. “We’d had such good experience with F5, we knew its accelerated SSL VPN solution would perform better than our existing technology,” says Diggory.

Benefits

Since implementing BIG-IP Edge Gateway, PersonalizationMall.com has experienced significant improvements in application performance across the WAN, giving remote and mobile workers a far better user experience. For IT, new security features and a fast, easy deployment process provide clear advantages.

Improved application performance

After implementing the F5 solution, PersonalizationMall.com saw immediate results. “With BIG-IP Edge Gateway, application and data performance improvement was immediately noticeable,” says Diggory. The company monitors video feeds from security cameras that are installed around the facility. “The video feeds are much faster than before—at 20 frames per second—it’s as if you are right in the building. Our executives are very happy, because it’s

easier to monitor business activities.”

“IT has seen significant time savings in implementations to get people up and running quickly, which wasn’t the case with our previous solution,” says Diggory. “It’s working with the new 64-bit Windows clients. BIG-IP Edge Gateway is considerably faster than a traditional VPN, so it’s a win-win for us.”

Greater VoIP reliability

With its previous VPN solution, users experienced a number of dropped calls. “We have seen a tremendous improvement with the new solution due to client-side traffic shaping,” notes Diggory. “Over BIG-IP Edge Gateway, the VoIP call sounds as clear as a wired phone, for more effective communication.”

PersonalizationMall.com is moving forward with operating system upgrades for mobile users. “Users have noticed a difference in the new phone clients—they are much more reliable,” he adds. “Now there is simplicity in connecting. People don’t have to fool around to make things work.”

Improved security policies

Previously, PersonalizationMall.com was using IPsec with Cisco but now uses SSL VPN through BIG-IP Edge Gateway. “Switching to SSL has given us an important security advantage,” says Diggory. Active Directory (AD) permissions and security settings are now integrated, which means users can use existing domain logins, without a new set of user and password credentials. “People like that; it’s a real time- and frustration-saver.” BIG-IP Edge Gateway also makes it possible for users to log on without a client, which the previous vendor did not offer.

Fast, painless deployment

The implementation process took two hours. “Launching BIG-IP Edge Gateway was very easy,” says Diggory. “We had help with the setup, and the F5 engineer walked us through the deployment.” The Edge Gateway interface is similar to BIG-IP LTM and BIG-IP GTM, so it was familiar for the IT team. “It surprised us that BIG-IP Edge

Gateway was up and running so quickly. It just worked and was seamless; it was a smooth transition.”

For PersonalizationMall.com, superior service is essential, and BIG-IP Edge Gateway provides that to remote users. “No matter where they are, people are still able to connect, and that’s very important to us,” concludes Diggory.

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