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Tal Yafe, Infrastructure Manager at Smile Media

Smile Media Accelerates Israel's Most Popular Websites with F5 BIG-IP LTM

When you are responsible for hosting some of the biggest e-commerce and content sites in the country, you can't afford to take chances. **Smile Media** is one of Israel's largest online media companies. It hosts more than 50 websites, which range in size from massive e-commerce sites and large, popular news portals to temporary mini-sites. The company wanted to reduce the risk of downtime, improve application performance, and scale up its IT infrastructure to meet the needs of growing numbers of Internet users.

Smile Media selected F5® BIG-IP® Local Traffic Manager™ (LTM) Application Delivery Controller and has benefited from reduced costs, time efficiencies, high availability, and faster page loads.

Business Challenges

Strong application performance is absolutely crucial for Smile Media. "Our websites are our face to our customers and our customers' customers," explained Tal Yafe, Infrastructure Manager at Smile Media. "We have to give all Internet users fast and reliable access to their preferred sites at all times."

One of Smile Media's websites is P1000. One of the biggest e-commerce sites in Israel, it sells everything from electronics and kitchen appliances to books and clothes. Every week, P1000 attracts 62,000 unique users, and

375,000 customers have registered to receive email newsletters from the site. Another of Smile Media's websites is one of the biggest gaming sites in Israel. It has a large community of users and serves 800,000 unique players every month.

In 2006, the volume of traffic coming into Smile Media's hosting center started to increase dramatically. While this was partly due to company growth, the increase in Internet usage was also driven by the political climate and a series of terrorist attacks in Israel. Yafe said, "It is unfortunate

Overview

Industry

Web hosting provider and online content publisher

Challenges

- Balance and accelerate growing volumes of Internet traffic
- Avoid unplanned application downtime
- Consolidate equipment in the data center
- Reduce the time required for network management

Solution

- BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager

Benefits

- Improve network speed by 50% and increase traffic
- Reduce downtime
- Cut web servers by 50%, lowering product, maintenance, and power costs
- Save time managing the networks

to say it, but one of the consequences of the terrorist attacks was increased Internet traffic, as people went online to find news and updates about current events." Smile Media recognized that many of its sites provided a crucial information service for citizens at this difficult time, and it didn't want to let people down with slow and unreliable website performance.

Solution

Smile Media had been using a load balancer for a number of years. It wanted to replace this with a new solution capable of supporting increased volumes of traffic. The company therefore evaluated a number of load balancing solutions from multiple vendors and tested each of them in its own IT environment. "We implemented F5's BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager product in our network as part of the trial, and it worked so well that we decided not to take it out again," recalled Yafe.

The F5 BIG-IP LTM 6400 device met Smile Media's immediate requirement for scalable load balancing, and it delivered other benefits, too. As a fully-featured Application Delivery Controller, the BIG-IP product combines advanced load balancing with technologies that accelerate applications, improve application traffic security, increase availability, and simplify network management. Smile Media recognized that these added features would help the business to improve the performance of its web applications and save time in the IT department.

The company installed two BIG-IP LTM 6400 units in an "active standby" configuration in its main data center. "It was simple to configure," said Yafe. "We didn't require much support from F5, so that proves that the product is easy to use—or that I have a very good IT team."

A feature of BIG-IP devices is F5 iRules®, a scripting language that gives network

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managers the flexibility to modify routing controls and standard functions in BIG-IP devices, depending on business needs. Smile Media used an iRule to block unauthorized access to some e-commerce services that are restricted to designated partners only. "Before, tasks like this were a big headache for the IT team," recalled Yafe. "F5 gave us a central management point for all web servers and made many tasks much easier for us. iRules helped us to be much more efficient."

Benefits

Smile Media now handles a far greater volume of traffic across the many websites that it hosts. Several of its sites have grown dramatically in recent years, including the website of GLGLTZ, the most popular radio station in Israel. Owned by the army, GLGLTZ broadcasts music, news, general interest programs, and traffic information. "Around 25,000 concurrent listeners tune into the station via the website that we host," said Yafe. "F5 handles 1.2 gigabytes of traffic per second on this connection alone."

Improve network speed by 50 percent

When the BIG-IP products went live, Smile Media recorded around a 50 percent increase in network speed. This represented a big business improvement for the company. "For every eight-second delay, online businesses lose 20 percent of their customers," explained Yafe. "The faster our websites load, the more users stay on the page."

Reduce downtime

In the past, Smile Media used to experience downtime when there were exceptionally high loads of traffic on its servers, and this was very damaging for the business. "Downtime has a very high impact on our business," admitted Yafe. "Most of our income comes from e-commerce sites and adverts on sites. When users cannot see our commercials, we don't earn any money."

Following the introduction of BIG-IP products and the installation of new hardware, application availability has improved significantly. BIG-IP products handle caching and provide network acceleration capabilities that improve the speed of traffic flows and reduce bandwidth requirements. "F5 has contributed greatly to better website uptime," said Yafe.

Lower product, maintenance, and power costs

Through the use of BIG-IP products, Smile Media has also been able to reduce the number of web servers in its data center by 50 percent, while at the same time serving more advertisements on more sites.

This has enabled the company to reduce hardware, software, power, and maintenance costs by consolidating equipment in its data center. "We need less electricity to run the servers and less IT time to manage them," said Yafe. "We have also been able to save several thousand dollars on third-party replication clients."

Since its original installation of F5, Smile Media has upgraded to the latest version of the BIG-IP system, and the product continues to support growing volumes of traffic. In testimony to the strong track record of BIG-IP products over many years, the company is now evaluating other solutions from F5.

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