



ENERGY COMPANY

"At first, they were focused on just providing SSL VPN remote access, but they soon saw that F5 brings an overall integration with VMware that they didn't see with any other vendor."

Mark Verhagen, Consulting Architect for VMware

Energy Company Deploys VMware View and F5 Solution for Better Remote Access, Stronger Performance

A large, growing energy company with extensive worldwide oil and gas assets needed to improve remote access to applications for its field workers and executives.

The company implemented an integrated solution that combines VMware View desktop virtualization software with the authentication and intelligent traffic management capabilities in F5® BIG-IP® technologies. Now, remote users have reliable anytime access, iPad users have secure access to the corporate network, and the company benefits from the strong relationship between VMware and F5. The integrated solution, which offers employees modern desktop technology, also boosts high performance and availability and enables consolidation of services.

Business Challenges

A large integrated energy company produces, transports, and stores oil and gas across North America and around the world. The company also upgrades and refines crude oil and markets gasoline, diesel, and other products.

With a large mobile workforce, the company needed to improve remote access for thousands of its field workers. Most of these laborers work on oil and gas sites in isolated locations, and they need to communicate daily with colleagues in the company's central office.

However, because of poor cellular phone reception and low bandwidth in these secluded sites, workers had to use unreliable WiMAX connections and other temporary Internet connections to communicate through the firm's internal network. Often, that solution would be inaccessible or the connection would be lost, resulting in frustrated users unable to send email messages to office employees. "The core, money-making part of our business is out in the field, so we really needed to improve accessibility for those workers," says a network architect for the company.

Overview

Industry

Oil and Gas

Challenges

- Provide network access for remote users
- Efficiently manage multiple data centers

Solution

- BIG-IP® Local Traffic Manager™
- BIG-IP® Global Traffic Manager™
- BIG-IP® Access Policy Manager®
- BIG-IP® Edge Client® app

Benefits

- Gives remote users secure, reliable anytime access
- Capitalizes on strong VMware and F5 partnership
- Improves performance, ensures availability
- Consolidates services and streamlines delivery
- Provides upgraded desktop technology

Reliable remote access was also critical for the company's executives, who increasingly rely on iPads to send and receive email and view their desktops while traveling. "It is essential that they can easily and reliably use their iPads from wherever they happen to be," says the network architect.

The company also planned to build a new multi-site data center configuration and needed a solution that could efficiently manage network traffic between the primary and backup sites. In addition, it wanted to replace several desktop software products that were outdated.

Solution

In May 2010, the company engaged VMware to implement VMware View, a desktop virtualization solution for delivering desktops as a managed service. The solution helps IT departments automate desktop and application management and improves data security by centralizing the desktop environment.

Initially, the company fronted the VMware View solution with a pair of Radware Alteon load balancers and sought a new SSL VPN solution that integrated well with VMware View. VMware suggested the company look at SSL VPN solutions from several vendors, including F5, Cisco, and Juniper. The F5 BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager (LTM) device provides intelligent network traffic management and application delivery. BIG-IP LTM also operates as a reverse proxy, offering SSL acceleration and termination as well as re-encryption to web servers. In addition, it offers failover handling and health monitoring capabilities.

The company was impressed when it tested BIG-IP LTM in front of the Alteon load balancers, not just for the SSL VPN features but also for the traffic management capabilities. Immediately, the firm deployed four of the devices to optimize the new VMware View solution.

During product evaluations, the organization also realized that it could use other F5 solutions to address additional

"With BIG-IP APM and the BIG-IP Edge Client app, all of our remote users have the same easy access to VMware View."

Network Architect

services and applications. For instance, both BIG-IP LTM and the BIG-IP Access Policy Manager (APM) module are designed to optimize VMware View. As a VMware partner, F5 has tested and demonstrated the advantages of deploying these products with VMware View.

"At first, they were focused on just providing SSL VPN remote access, but they soon saw that F5 brings an overall integration with VMware that they didn't see with any other vendor," says Mark Verhagen, Consulting Architect for VMware. "They recognized that F5 was a leader across multiple solutions, not just remote access but also network traffic management. They were also interested in ensuring that the vendors they chose were able to work well together, and they saw that with VMware and F5."

Shortly after implementing the BIG-IP LTM devices, the company added BIG-IP APM, which features single sign-on and secure remote access and would be able to give all of the company's remote users a common platform from which to access VMware View.

The firm also used the F5 BIG-IP Edge Client app, which gives iPad and iPhone users secure, convenient access to corporate materials. The BIG-IP Edge Client app works directly with BIG-IP APM, which centralizes application access control for iPad users.

Also, the organization saw that it could use the F5 BIG-IP Global Traffic Manager (GTM) device to point network users to the closest or highest-performing data center. "We liked how BIG-IP GTM provides visibility into

application health and offers geolocation capabilities, so our overseas users can be directed to the best-performing of the two data centers," says the company's network architect. The company installed two BIG-IP GTM devices to handle its planned multi-site data center configuration.

During a proof of concept started in December 2011, the company tested VMware View for 800 employees. A total of 6,000 users are planned by the end of 2012.

Benefits

The energy company's integrated F5 and VMware solution gives remote users secure and reliable access to the information they need every day through highly adopted desktop software. At the same time, it increases system performance and ensures high availability while enabling consolidation of services and applications. Moreover, the company benefits from the solid working relationship between F5 and VMware.

Gives remote users secure, reliable anytime access

With the new VMware and F5 solution, all remote workers have secure and reliable access to VMware View at any time. For example, executives using iPads can use the BIG-IP Edge Client app to quickly, easily log on to VMware View using single sign-on fields. Field workers using 3G cards in remote sites can use a similar process to access VMware View.

"With BIG-IP APM and the BIG-IP Edge Client app, all of our remote users have the same easy access to VMware View, so they can stay productive while away from the office," says the network architect. "And they no longer have to deal with dropped connections, so they don't waste time reconnecting to the system."

The company is also exploring a bring-your-own-device (BYOD) scenario, where remote users could use their own mobile devices to access VMware View remotely. "They might not have made that decision without F5," says Verhagen. "Through BIG-IP APM,

we can provide secure access from their devices to VMware View, limiting that access in order to ensure there are no security loopholes.”

Capitalizes on strong VMware and F5 partnership

Because of the strong partnership between F5 and VMware, the customer benefits from a tightly integrated solution. “We have a close partnership that allows us to understand what F5 is developing, so we have a kind of visibility we don’t have with other partners,” says Verhagen. “The joint collaboration between F5’s and VMware’s product management and engineering groups really benefits our customers.”

In addition, this partnership gives the company a streamlined solution that reduced hardware and was easily implemented. Initially, the organization considered purchasing an SSL VPN solution from one vendor, a load balancing solution from another vendor, and an authentication solution from a third vendor. Instead, the company was able to implement a single solution with integrated VMware and F5 products that work seamlessly together.

Improves performance, ensures availability

Previously, the company used another vendor to manage traffic for its VMware ThinApp solution, which decouples applications from their operating systems for streamlined delivery and management. With that solution, the firm experienced performance issues and slow response times. Now, however, with the intelligent network traffic capabilities of BIG-IP LTM, the company has seen improved performance and streaming for ThinApp packages.

Availability of ThinApp applications has also improved. When a user logs on to a VMware

View desktop, the user accesses applications from a repository fronted by BIG-IP LTM.

“It’s critical that users have quick access to these applications, so the applications themselves need to be just as available as the desktops,” says Verhagen. “BIG-IP LTM can detect if there’s a problem or delay, and direct the user to the faster repository.”

Consolidates services and streamlines delivery

The company was also able to consolidate devices and services by implementing the integrated F5 and VMware solution. “Consolidating devices was extremely important to us,” says the network architect. “With F5, we were able to deploy a single solution for high availability, two-factor authentication, SSL VPN, and network traffic management on the same piece of hardware, which also sits in front of the VMware View servers. That would have taken several different pieces of hardware using a comparable solution.”

Also, using VMware View along with BIG-IP LTM, the company consolidated thousands of applications down to 1,500 and was able to streamline application delivery across the entire user base.

Provides upgraded desktop technology

Using VMware View, the company’s users have the latest technology for their desktops. To date, more than 99 percent of employees have reported being satisfied with VMware View. “The employees have a brand new desktop experience that follows them and is easily accessible,” says Verhagen. “And thanks to the optimizations F5 provides, users have reliable access to a solution that works amazingly well.”

F5 Networks, Inc. 401 Elliott Avenue West, Seattle, WA 98119 888-882-4447 www.f5.com

F5 Networks, Inc.
Corporate Headquarters
info@f5.com

F5 Networks
Asia-Pacific
apacinfo@f5.com

F5 Networks Ltd.
Europe/Middle-East/Africa
emeainfo@f5.com

F5 Networks
Japan K.K.
f5j-info@f5.com

