



"We needed to build an extremely powerful and flexible network for our broadcast operations, and we had three months to do it. F5 played a big part in making that happen."

Cindy Cortell, Director of Information Technology, MLB Network

MLB Network Delivers 100 Percent Uptime for Broadcasts, Secure Remote Access with F5

MLB Network, the national cable television network for Major League Baseball, televises live MLB games and other Emmy Award-winning original programming, including live studio shows airing highlights, breaking news, interviews, and analysis. MLB Network debuted in 2009 in about 50 million homes and has since grown to serve 70 million in the United States and Puerto Rico.

As it prepared for launch, MLB Network had only three months to build a new network infrastructure and become fully operational. Using F5 solutions, MLB Network is now able to ensure 100 percent uptime for its live broadcasts. In addition, it provides employees secure remote access to internal systems and data, anytime and anywhere.

Business Challenges

In 2008, MLB Network acquired the former studio headquarters of MSNBC in Secaucus, New Jersey. The facility, however, was full of outdated broadcast equipment, which needed to be upgraded with a new state-of-the-art broadcast system. In addition to building two new studios, MLB Network needed to build an entirely new network infrastructure to support its broadcast operations as well as its backend systems. The network needed to provide continuous uptime during broadcasts and give employees and vendors secure remote access to backend systems during live events.

To achieve what would be the largest launch in cable television history, MLB Network put together a team of 16 professionals to deploy the new broadcast system, install a 10-gigabit fiber backbone, and build a completely new and powerful LAN.

The entire infrastructure needed to be operational by October 15, 2008, as many of the on-air automation systems were dependent on the LAN. Once the infrastructure was complete, time was also needed to train users on the new system, which was scheduled for November 1.

Overview

Industry

Broadcasting and Entertainment

Challenges

- Build cost-effective network within short timeframe
- Ensure 100 percent uptime of broadcast operations
- Enable secure remote access for employees and vendors

Solution

- BIG-IP® Local Traffic Manager™
- FirePass®

Benefits

- Highly reliable network performance
- Improved usability
- Cost-effective operations

Any delay in the infrastructure development would potentially set back MLB Network's scheduled on-air launch date of January 1, 2009.

MLB Network contacted F5 to help it efficiently manage its network, meet its goal of 100 percent uptime, and provide employees and vendors secure connectivity to backend systems. "We needed to build an extremely powerful and flexible network for our broadcast operations, and we had only three months to do it," says Cindy Cortell, Director of Information Technology at MLB Network. "F5 played big part in making that happen."

Solution

To ensure availability under constantly changing network conditions, such as spikes in traffic during live events, MLB Network deployed BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager (LTM). BIG-IP LTM is a highly customizable solution that provides intelligent traffic management, SSL offloading, and access control. MLB Network also uses an F5 SSL VPN solution to give employees and vendors secure remote access to business applications and data through an Internet browser.

Benefits

With F5 solutions, MLB Network streamlined the process of building a robust, reliable network infrastructure to serve its two broadcast studios. The solutions also reduced MLB Network's need for new appliances, ensuring that CapEx was kept to a minimum throughout the implementation process.

Working with F5, MLB Network completed the project on time and under budget, allowing the network to launch on January 1, 2009, as planned. As a result, MLB Network received the 2009 Project of the Year award from the Project Management

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Institute—New Jersey Chapter, for its Back Office/Broadcast Backbone LAN and Network Deployment.

Highly reliable network performance

MLB Network's flexible, scalable network has performed flawlessly for more than three years. With F5 solutions in place, MLB Network has been able to keep its operations up and running, adjusting resources according to current network conditions—even during 2011's Hurricane Irene. Through the capabilities provided by F5 solutions, network performance is well balanced and efficient, with mission-critical, on-air applications taking priority over less essential resources, resulting in 100 percent uptime.

"It's an incredible facility with two broadcast studios," notes Cortell. "It can get pretty intense. But the infrastructure is solid and extremely reliable."

Improved usability

Employees find that LAN accessibility from any Internet-connected endpoint is ideal to allow them to maintain productivity, even from ballparks around the country. Using F5's SSL VPN solution, employees and vendors can transmit mission-critical data during marquee events such as player drafts, All-Star games, and the World Series. This capability also ensures that administrators can configure, manage, and troubleshoot

applications and the network anywhere, anytime—exactly what is needed for a 24x7 operation like MLB Network.

Cost-effective operations

By providing 100 percent uptime and minimizing CapEx, the F5 solution has enabled MLB Network to meet its return on investment (ROI) goal. The network has performed planned upgrades and maintenance without any loss of equipment or availability. In addition, the reliable service MLB Network provides has supported its significant growth since its launch in 2009.

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