F5 Introduces Converged App Delivery and Security Platform Optimized for AI

by **Zeus Kerravala**
March 3, 2025

This article originally appeared in *Network Computing*.

F5 unveiled its new converged Application Delivery and Security Platform, designed for hybrid multi-cloud environments and optimized for AI. It aims to enhance application delivery and security through unified management and automation.

F5, a longtime market leader in application delivery, kicked off day one of its AppWorld conference in Las Vegas by announcing what it described as the first converged application delivery controller (ADC) and security platform for hybrid multi-cloud infrastructures in an increasingly AI-focused world.

The new F5 Application Delivery and Security Platform combines high-performance load balancing and traffic management with app and API security.

Earlier this year, the company announced its ADC 3.0 vision to align its core product line with the AI era. While F5 has had many competitors emerge over the years, including big-name brands such as Cisco, NetScaler, Juniper and Riverbed, it has stayed ahead of the curve through acquisitions and alignment with market trends. Although the vendor didn't release an official 2.0 vision for moving on-premises to cloud, it's now evolving the product for AI.

Interest in AI is high, but it's fair to say that deploying AI is expensive, raises complexity and creates new cyber risks that can effectively paralyze IT and security teams. I like to position F5 as the "Rosetta Stone" of IT, as its ADC translates between networking and applications and now security. This gives the company a unique role to play in solving the challenges of AI in a hybrid, multi-cloud environment.

What the F5 Platform Offers

The new F5 platform addresses challenges for enterprises that operate hybrid multi-cloud environments by offering the following:

- A single platform for application delivery and security for all apps that's simple for IT and security teams to manage.
- Flexible deployment in any form factor for seamless operation across varied IT environments. This includes hardware, software and cloud with a single operational model.
- Single policy and unified management to reduce complexity and increase efficiency across multiple locations.

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- Actionable analytics and insights enterprises can use to improve performance and strengthen security.
- Fully programmable data planes for automated deployment and custom functional-ity to meet organizations' evolving needs.
- Full lifecycle automation so teams can focus on innovation, not maintenance work.

In a prebriefing, Greg Maudsley, senior director of product marketing at F5, said he believes the product is well positioned because of its single platform for application delivery and security, API automation, and consistent security policies across the cloud, on-premises and the edge.

"This is not just checkbox functionality," Maudsley said. "This platform is highly automatable with APIs, which allows you to have things like consistent security policies across a hybrid multi-cloud environment."

Converging App Delivery and Security in the Era of AI

Lori MacVittie, distinguished engineer and chief evangelist for F5, said this unified platform is the culmination of years of innovation and acquisitions, including Volterra and NGINX. What began as a consolidated physical platform 30 years ago evolved into an ADC for all the activity that exploded with the rise of the internet and the need for cybersecurity. Then came the cloud, and now AI is on the rise, which is prompting the development of AI point solutions, she said.

"We see things like prompt security, a very specific problem that needs a specific point solution to solve it," MacVittie said. "We see AI gateways coming."

She also cited F5 research showing that organizations struggle in increasingly distributed, multi-cloud, hybrid environments. Respondents cited inconsistent security and delivery policies as their top frustrations.

"They want to consolidate," MacVittie said. "They want to reduce the number of vendors, tools, consoles, APIs and actual services they have to operate and do business."

New Platform Capabilities

F5 also announced several new offerings and capabilities as part of its F5 Application Delivery and Security Platform. These include:

- F5 AI Gateway for streamlining interactions between applications, APIs and large language models and enabling continued enterprise AI adoption.
- An AI assistant for F5 NGINX One uses the capabilities of its AI Assistant for F5 Distributed Cloud Services. Powered by the F5 AI Data Fabric, the assistant is an intelligent partner for network, security and development operations teams.
- New additions to its VELOS line with the F5 VELOS CX1610 chassis and BX520 blades to provide enterprises and service providers with a unified, customized option to optimize data-intensive AI and other modern workload apps.

- Later this year, F5 said it plans to introduce an AI assistant for its BIG-IP to "bring a new level of automation and intelligence to iRules." It will use AI to automate the creation, maintenance and optimization of iRules while reducing the time and resources required to manage traffic and securely deliver apps effectively.

AI is changing almost every aspect of IT, with most of the attention focused on compute infrastructure, most notably GPU-enabled servers. If companies are going to be successful with AI, the technology up and down the stack needs to change, which includes everything between the apps and the network. The ADC plays a key role in ensuring applications can be delivered efficiently and securely, and it will play an important role in controlling costs while ensuring performance is high.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zeus Kerravala is the founder and principal analyst with ZK Research. Kerravala provides tactical advice and strategic guidance to help his clients in both the current business climate and the long term. He delivers research and insight to the following constituents: end-user IT and network managers; vendors of IT hardware, software and services; and members of the financial community looking to invest in the companies that he covers.

CONTACT

zeus@zkresearch.com
Cell: 301-775-7447
Office: 978-252-5314