

Solution Brief

F5-Oracle Partnership: Accelerating Enterprise Application Deployments

Date: June 2013 **Author:** John Mazur, Senior Analyst

Abstract: *Recognizing the obstacles to business application deployment and satisfaction, Oracle and F5 have partnered to provide a practical ADC-based integrated solution that addresses the top networking challenges facing organizations considering new application deployments. But broader IT professional awareness of the benefits of application delivery networking is needed.*

Overview

Application performance is highly dependent on the robustness of the enterprise IT environment, and application delivery controllers (ADCs) can optimize and accelerate distributed IT infrastructure to assure application performance. However, ADCs can be a challenge to configure for the uninitiated, who may be more inclined to grow server and network capacity or add cloud services, which are usually more time-consuming, costly tasks that can have uncertain outcomes. To better ensure customers' application deployment success and long-term satisfaction, Oracle and F5 have pre-integrated their complementary offerings to ease deployment efforts and guarantee end-user satisfaction with mission-critical Oracle-based business applications.

The benefits of the F5-Oracle collaboration include:

- Higher performance, availability, and security for application environments
- Pre-integration of Oracle apps with F5's BIG-IP platform for faster and lower-risk deployments
- Lowered OPEX, CAPEX, and TCO for the application environment

Enterprise application environments have become increasingly unpredictable as their underlying IT infrastructure grows in complexity, size and criticality to the organization. In addition to supporting mission-critical business applications, IT personnel are faced with new security threats, server and storage virtualization, globalization, regulatory compliance, and the integration of cloud-based services and big data initiatives, all of which are challenging the performance and reliability of their IT infrastructure.

The traditional solution of blindly adding capacity (servers, storage, and network upgrades) can no longer guarantee desired application performance results, is prohibitively expensive, and requires long lead times. However, since few enterprises consider themselves information technology companies, many continue to follow the traditional "wait and see" practice of adding new business applications, logging complaints, then adding IT capacity as needed to improve application performance. This practice results in increased IT workload, user dissatisfaction and resistance to the new business applications, and loss of value for the deployment. However, a more proactive way to roll-out new enterprise applications and services is to optimize and accelerate the application environment with an ADC.

Faster Time to Value

Oracle is a leading business applications provider that places high value on customer satisfaction, but it can't control the application environment that its applications are deployed in. The Oracle E-Business suite is a collection of integrated business applications designed to help organizations make better decisions, reduce costs, and increase performance. Oracle provides continuous enhancements of its E-Business suite to keep it on the leading edge. To help ensure a high quality of experience with E-Business suite, Oracle recommends its customers include application delivery networking technology when deploying E-Business suite. Joint solutions with F5 reference designs, documentation, and support are available. Customers electing to use an integrated solution typically enjoy more successful application deployments, higher end-user satisfaction, and time-to-value improvements.

F5 Networks is a leading application delivery controller (ADC) vendor for application delivery networking technologies, which optimize and secure network-based applications by actively managing server workloads and network flows to prioritize and enhance application performance and availability. F5's technical approach provides reductions in the cost and complexity of application environments while providing enhanced security, visibility, and control. F5's network appliances include its flagship BIG-IP series and the highly scalable VIPRION ADC system. Both are orchestrated by F5's Traffic Management Operating System (TMOS). ADCs are typically deployed ahead of web, application, and database servers to balance traffic and offload routine processing-intensive functions such as encryption, traffic screening, server status monitoring, and policy administration. ADCs allow enterprises to improve the performance of their application environments and better control and monitor their underlying IT infrastructures. And they offer a compelling alternative to the "old school" IT shop approach of throwing more capacity at application environment problems. ADCs do present another device to deploy and manage. However, ESG has found that most who have tried ADCs swear by them and won't go back to their previous method of operation (just blindly adding to capacity).

Pre-integration and Support

F5's TMOS allows for the inspection, prioritization, and policy-based manipulation of IP traffic flows—its iRules is a Tool Command Language (TCL)-based scripting language that allows third parties to write rules and policies to control application traffic. iApps provide customizable application services and templates, and iControl is an API for machine-to-machine communications and programmability. Recognizing that learning and writing iRules and iApps, and working with iControl could be an additional obstacle to overworked IT personnel, Oracle and F5 decided to pre-integrate their products to spare IT the time, effort, and expense of doing so. The companies also provide expanded support, including on F5's DevCentral—an F5 administered technical support community. Additional support is provided from Oracle. The majority of the Oracle-F5 integration appears in iApp (see Figure 1). The companies report that the partnership's customers experience more rapid deployments with higher overall Oracle application satisfaction and performance with a lower TCO.

Figure 1. iApp GUI for Oracle E-Business Application Suite

F5's iApp for Oracle E-Business Suite streamlines network configuration

Source: F5, 2013.

Analysis

F5 and Oracle's application performance partnership addresses several key enterprise pain points that ESG research respondents have reported facing with the deployment of new applications¹

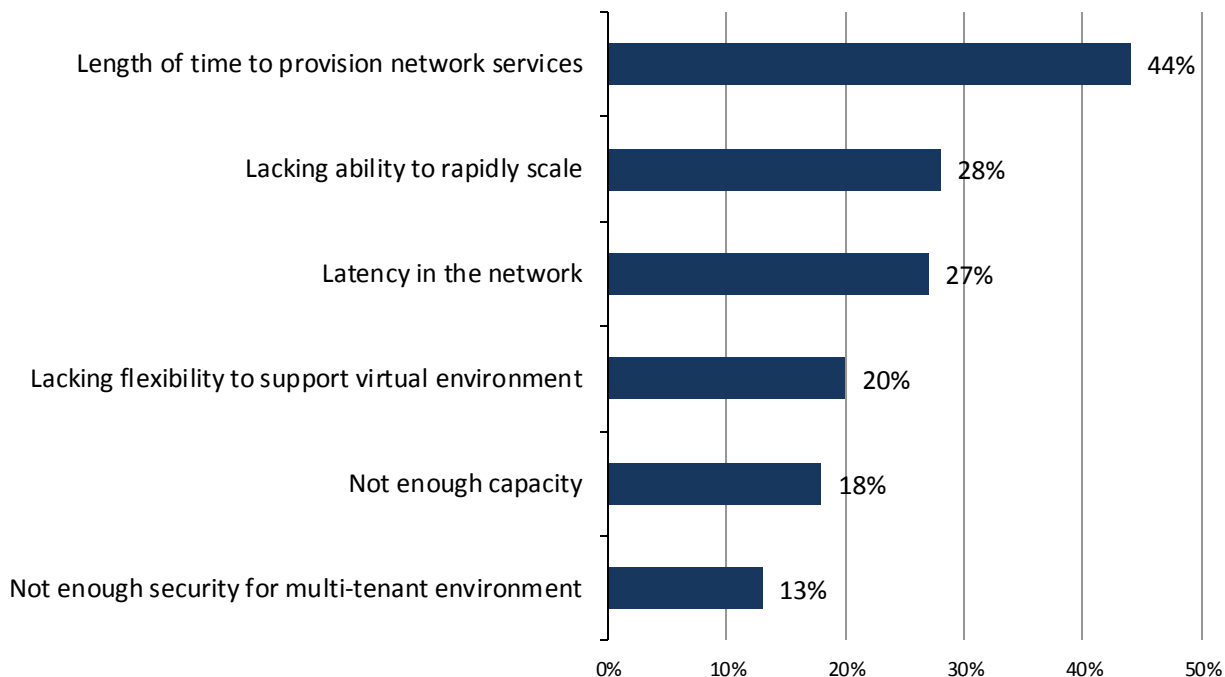
- **Organizations need more robust application environments.** ESG research respondents indicated that the length of time to provision network services, inability to rapidly scale, network latency, lack of flexibility to support virtualization, inadequate network capacity, and lack of multi-tenant security were all concerns when considering new applications (see Figure 2).²

¹ Source: ESG Research Brief, *Are Legacy Networks Slowing Down Application Deployments?*, August 2012.

² Source: ESG Market Landscape Report, *The Emergence of Software-defined Network Architectures*, May 2013.

Figure 2. *Biggest Network Challenges When Deploying New Applications*

What are the biggest network challenges your organization encounters when deploying a new application? (Percent of respondents, N=97, three responses accepted)



Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, 2013.

- Application delivery controllers address these concerns.** In addition to providing load balancing among servers, network, and storage, ADCs also provide application visibility and prioritization, secure access, and traffic management options including policy, encryption, and compression. Practically speaking, ADCs reduce “friction” between the application and transport layers. Physical-, virtual-, and software-based ADCs are available in various configurations and capacities. Key end-user benefits of including an ADC in an application environment are improved application availability, performance, visibility, and security. Other business benefits include deployment agility and improved IT capacity planning which, in a stable application environment, can lead to CAPEX and OPEX reductions.

Pre-integrating F5’s ADC with Oracle’s business applications improves the capabilities of a legacy application environment while making IT’s job easier, and with no additional integration or support burden. Other than having to abandon the familiar “wait and see” cycle and committing to buy an ADC up-front, what’s not to like?

Customer Case Study – Byer California

Byer California, a privately held clothing manufacturer, was in the process of expanding and globalizing its manufacturing operations. Byer is a mid-sized enterprise that operates in a highly competitive wholesale segment where business agility is the key to growth and profitability. IT is seen as its engine of business productivity. IT is used to rapidly match customer demands with its many suppliers’ capacities. Byer was in the process of deploying Oracle E-Business Suite with customizations when IT staff grew concerned about its current application environment’s ability to effectively support the deployment. Byer’s CIO and infrastructure manager decided to explore optimizing its application environment. The alternative was a costly and lengthy infrastructure build-out cycle before the new Oracle application deployment’s performance and business value could be assured.

Byer explored Oracle's best practices and partner network and learned that Oracle had a partnership with F5, the leading application delivery networking solution provider. Oracle had partnered with F5 to help ensure customer satisfaction with the performance of its business applications. To provide even greater client value, F5 pre-integrated Oracle applications in its Big IP iApps configuration utility to make it more "plug and play" into Byer's IT infrastructure. "Big IP was an excellent investment that continues to pay IT dividends," commented Mandar Ghosalkar, IT Infrastructure Manager at Byer. Mandar continued, "in addition to higher overall application environment performance and availability, we gained improved application and network control and visibility." Byer still invests in increasing its IT capacity to accommodate continued growth, but can now do so more selectively and just-in-time with help from F5's tools.

The Bigger Truth

For ADC-less organizations about to deploy Oracle's E-Business suite, F5 and Oracle's pre-integration offers a compelling added-value package to deploy F5's ADC with Oracle's E-Business suite now rather than later. ADCs have evolved way beyond server load balancers, and server virtualization and the cloud have made IT's job more complex. Debating whether to add to capacity or optimize what you have via policy with an ADC makes IT's job interesting. However, the intelligent capacity planning tools provided by a strategically located ADC between servers and network in an increasingly complex application environment make the decision to deploy an ADC far easier. And don't forget the organizational benefits of the improved time-to-value from a more agile application deployment cycle, end-user satisfaction, productivity, and profits. As a best practice, ESG recommends having an ADC control dispersed application environments.