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Bruce Williams
Acting Manager of Network and Communication Services



Griffith University Improves Application Performance and Availability with BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager

Industry

Education

Challenges

- Improve application performance
- Provide intelligent traffic management for a range of applications and servers
- Meet the demand for continuous uptime

Solution

- F5 BIG-IP® Local Traffic Manager™

Benefits

- Intelligent and customisable network management
- Fast, reliable user access to applications
- Immediate cost savings
- Reduction in application downtime

Overview

Griffith University is an organisation in motion. Founded in 1975, the Australian university has grown to include five campuses and 3,500 teaching staff, delivering higher education services to more than 37,000 students. Priding itself on innovation, the university has several key initiatives, including the development of its electronic learning facilities.

The university faced application performance and availability issues that required more advanced traffic management capabilities than its previous load balancer offered. By implementing F5 BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager, Griffith University was able to improve application performance, eliminate downtime, and decrease costs in the data centre.

Challenge

The load balancing solution Griffith University had in place was too simplistic to meet the university's requirements. Operating in a PeopleSoft environment, a standard three-tier web layer, there was a need for a more intuitive traffic management system that would accelerate application performance over the network.

In addition to general load balancing, Griffith University requires the ability to manage traffic for LDAP servers, secure LDAP servers,

SMTP servers, and other applications.

Challenged with serving the university stakeholders with continuous uptime, the network and application specialists sought a solution that could provide advanced traffic management, superior network management, and continuous application availability.

Solution

The university selected F5 BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager (LTM) primarily due to F5's reputation as the leader in Application Delivery Networking. "BIG-IP LTM was clearly the solution best able to support our ongoing strategy of continuous reliability," says Bruce Williams, Acting Manager of Network and Communication Services at Griffith University. "During discussions with our counterparts in other organisations, we found F5 was the only contender."

In addition to basic load balancing, BIG-IP LTM provides intelligent traffic management capabilities that enable the university to perform application health checks and direct traffic to maintain the best possible performance for PeopleSoft and other applications. BIG-IP LTM also provides data compression and SSL offloading, which not only simplifies management of SSL certificates but optimizes server utilization and capacity.



Griffith University also took part in the training offered by F5's Professional Services team. "Our ability to successfully implement and deploy the F5 solutions was enhanced by the interactive and informative training course," Williams says. "We were able to take real life examples and receive individual attention relative to our architecture."

Benefits

Implementing BIG-IP LTM solved the university's application delivery challenges and opened up new opportunities to address its future strategy. "If we continued with the old solution, we would have been unable to achieve many extra initiatives that are possible with the F5 solution," says Williams. "We chose F5 BIG-IP LTM for numerous reasons. The most important one was that it enabled easy management of load balancing, greatly reducing application downtime."

Customised network management

Intelligent network management was the first benefit realised by the university after implementation. With the F5 solution, the networking team is able to write custom probes to see if any individual application or device is running.

"With PeopleSoft you can't check just one web server; you need to determine on many layers whether

the system is up," says Williams. "The network management was made easy with the BIG-IP LTM point-and-click interface, a much more effective option than command-based prompts."

After implementation, other groups within the university leveraged the new technology to meet their own business goals. The application architecture group were specifically interested in using BIG-IP LTM to meet their traffic management challenges.

Zero downtime

In line with the university's directive of continuous reliability, BIG-IP LTM enables the input of critical application patches with zero downtime. "We are able to access the application, remove it and apply the patch, and place it back without anyone noticing," says Williams. "Students and staff therefore experience much better levels of accessibility than they would achieve without BIG-IP LTM."

Currently the university is migrating between two platforms for the Intranet. Users can reliably access all pages, yet in the background the pages are being delivered from different platforms, some from legacy systems and some from the new content management platform. This ability to provide a seamless network transition is essential for the organisation.

Cost and time savings

The university has realised cost savings in several areas of the network. Williams explains, "We used to have about 20 SSL certificates sitting on 20 servers, so when the certificates were up for renewal we would need to process 20 times. BIG-IP LTM enables us to renew one certificate for all the servers. This saves both time and money."

A further saving is made possible by leveraging BIG-IP LTM to compress data, subsequently freeing up servers. The load on the data centre is always increasing and this compression would not be possible without BIG-IP LTM.

Strategy for the future

In 2007, Griffith University invested in additional F5 products to add to its IT network. These products underpin several projects the university plans to implement in the future. "We intend to further optimise our configuration with the new BIG-IP LTM devices and to test and implement the WebAccelerator module," Williams remarks. "In addition, we have been developing our own dashboards and reporting tools that work with the F5 tools to provide essential data used in directing the overall university strategy."

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