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Steven Opstaele, Chief Infrastructure Architect at NorthgateArinso

NorthgateArinso secures and accelerates HR web applications with F5's BIG-IP

NorthgateArinso was created in 2007 following the acquisition of ARINSO International by Northgate Information Solutions. The combination of both entities resulted in a global Human Resources (HR) leader with more than half a century of HR expertise. NorthgateArinso focuses on helping HR executives optimise service delivery through smarter processes and more efficient technologies. In order to achieve this, NorthgateArinso supports key HR areas like workforce administration, payroll, benefits, recruitment, learning, and talent management. The company has developed its own euHReka HR services platform, offered in 50 countries and in 24 languages. euHReka is a multi-tenant application largely based on the SAP ERP platform.

The outsourced and on-demand HR services have very high response times and availability goals in order to meet customer SLAs. NorthgateArinso turned to F5 to provide safe access and traffic management technology to enable optimum system performance.

Business Challenge

The internet has become one of the major channels for NorthgateArinso to deliver its services. A high-tech virtualized data centre in Brussels, Belgium, plays a pivotal role in offering worldwide customers such as Cadbury, AstraZeneca and euHReka On Demand users access to software and services. Additional regional centres in the US and Asia make sure customers in these regions have fast access to data.

Verecke: “In the course of time, more and more customers asked us to provide our services through the internet. This avoids the need for expensive leased lines, allowing use of their internet connection as a cost-

effective alternative. In response to this need we created a new, shared platform for web-based services as well as a new front-end to provide access to our systems. Within this shared euHReka environment, all traffic is handled via the Internet.”

One of the main concerns of customers was the level of application security. HR-related data is always confidential. The internet may be cost-effective compared to leased lines, but clients cannot allow HR data to be compromised. Addressing this issue drove NorthgateArinso to examine various methods of providing this peace of mind without compromising performance.

Overview

Industry

HR business solutions

Challenges

- Provision of secure Web application access
- Improve application response times for a global customer base

Solutions

- BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager with Application Security Manager module
- BIG-IP Global Traffic Manager
- Enterprise Manager

Benefits

- Unified management
- Easy configuration of security through use of iRules
- Improved service delivery
- Consolidated hardware infrastructure

Partner

Verizon Business Services

Solution

Initially, NorthgateArinso focused mainly on security issues, with the emphasis on intrusion detection. Optimisation was added as a requirement shortly down the line.

Steven Opstaele, Chief Infrastructure Architect at NorthgateArinso: "After we specced out our objectives, it became clear that F5's BIG-IP was the most flexible solution and was best able to meet our requirements for performance and web security. F5's direct competitors either missed specific features we needed or were not able to provide a global solution. For example, both Citrix and Cisco miss the flexibility that F5's iRules control language offers."

F5's powerful web interface facilitates easy implementation of new security features and roll-out of new web services.

"We were especially happy with BIG-IP's Enterprise Manager, which allows unified management from one location. Also, F5's iRules control language makes it very easy to configure the device for optimum web security. The iRules are used to adapt HTTP header variables, perform redirections, integrate multiple applications behind one entry point, enforce restrictions on IP level, or enforce restrictions based on group memberships."

Benefits

Implementing BIG-IP has enabled NorthgateArinso to significantly speed up its service delivery. "Before, it could take quite a while to get a new customer up and running; sometimes days," says Steve Vereecken. "Typically, this required new hardware and a new, separate, firewall, all of which had to be configured. Today, customers are serviced through a highly scalable and shared SAP platform.

"Our services are available as an onsite software solution, through a business process outsourcing model, or as an on-demand solution,"

Steve Vereecke, Chief Technical Officer at NorthgateArinso.

All traffic is routed via the BIG-IP device, which provides security, routing, fast caching, compression and acceleration, all from a single system, which in turn reduces complexity. Because BIG-IP is a single platform, single interface system, we've also benefited from hardware consolidation and therefore cost savings, as the need for many separate devices is removed."

Steven Opstaele adds: "It is now possible to connect a new client very quickly – in a matter of hours. This is especially useful when a customer wants a demo of our system. We can get them live very quickly and securely. F5's reputation in the market has actually been helpful – F5 is well-known by our customers as a reliable security solution."

Since the F5 implementation in early 2009 by Verizon Business Services, NorthgateArinso has rolled-out F5 in the US and Asia as well. These data centres mainly provide caching of dynamic data from the Belgian database to reduce regional latency. The effects of latency are dependent on the application, the location, and the browser. Using F5 to accelerate cached content has meant 80 to 200ms has been knocked off round trip times, depending on location.

Steven Opstaele: "If the customer is still not satisfied, we switch to a public Content Delivery Network (CDN), which is even

closer to the end-user than our data centres. However, that CDN will still use go through the F5 device to connect to the application, so security is not compromised. All in all, we can now offer customers a highly reliable and secure web platform, which is an important factor for future success."

