

WAN Optimisation

– Saving Costs & Application Deployments

Trends in IT strategy continue to see interest in the adoption of off-site Hosted Data Centre environments; this has been spurred on recently by the adoption of Server Virtualisation techniques that can seriously reduce the footprint required to support typical Enterprise Applications. Since rack space in Hosted Data Centres is charged at a premium, Server Virtualisation has made it possible for many more organisations to consider a Hosted IT model to reduce initial and ongoing operational costs associated with an in-house Data Centre's facilities and IT support staff costs.

The WAN Optimisation market now looks set to support this IT trend for moving Servers away from HQ LANs, where Users access Servers at Gigabit speeds, to 'remote' Server deployments accessed by Users over lower capacity, slower, and more expensive WAN Services. The performance mis-match between the HQ LAN and affordable WAN services is where carefully deployed WAN Optimisation mechanisms can help Hosted Application initiatives such as Hosted Data Centres or Cloud Computing models.

WAN Optimisation techniques and solutions have been around, in various forms, for many years now; however these techniques now appear under a unified "Application Acceleration" banner in the form of consolidated Application Acceleration Appliances. The latest WAN Optimisation solutions now include advanced application compression, local caching, traffic shaping,

prioritisation and other bandwidth management techniques.

Now as before, WAN Optimisation solutions are designed to save bandwidth and bandwidth costs whilst providing consistent and definable Application response times to selected Application types. This can be particularly useful on congested Internet feeds as well as on private WAN access circuits where native FIFO principles of networking take little account of actual line of business application needs vs. personal use or low priority batch traffic for example.

We believe in 2009/10, WAN Optimisation supported by better more intuitive Application Acceleration techniques is likely to be a key technology in enabling viable Hosted Data Centre solutions, where Servers become remote from significant numbers of Client PC Users based on the HQ LAN.

Networks First has multi-vendor experience in all areas of networking including the provisioning and support of WAN Optimisation solutions. Whilst Packeteer (now Bluecoat) has been a leading player in this market almost from its inception and others such as Riverbed are prevalent players, Cisco has moved in recent years to capture a significant share of this market and indeed now has WAN Optimisation Appliances in their range for Data Centres through to WAN Optimisation modules that cost effectively can reside in Cisco Branch ISR Routers.

The following Cisco WAE solution overview sets the scene for further understanding of the technical merits of WAN Optimisation – that apply modern Application Acceleration techniques to illustrate how this technology can improve Application response times across a Wide Area Network provision.

LAN-like Application Performance – Cisco WAE Example

The Cisco WAE solution provides LAN-like performance for a wide variety of Enterprise Applications delivered across the WAN. Typical acceleration factors range from 3 to 10 times. Some of the most popular applications such as file sharing and software distribution can be accelerated by up to 100 times according to the Cisco statistics as illustrated below.

There are many WAN Optimisation techniques and products on the market of which perhaps Cisco and Packeteer are the best known. Of all the systems available it is considered best to employ a bespoke WAN Optimisation Appliance particularly at larger sites. Regardless of manufacturer or the WAN Optimisation system employed, the approach to implementation is always the same:

1) Benchmark Native Network Performance – this is done by implementing the WAN Optimisation system in a relatively dumb mode to capture all traffic types and to observe competing bandwidth utilisation patterns.

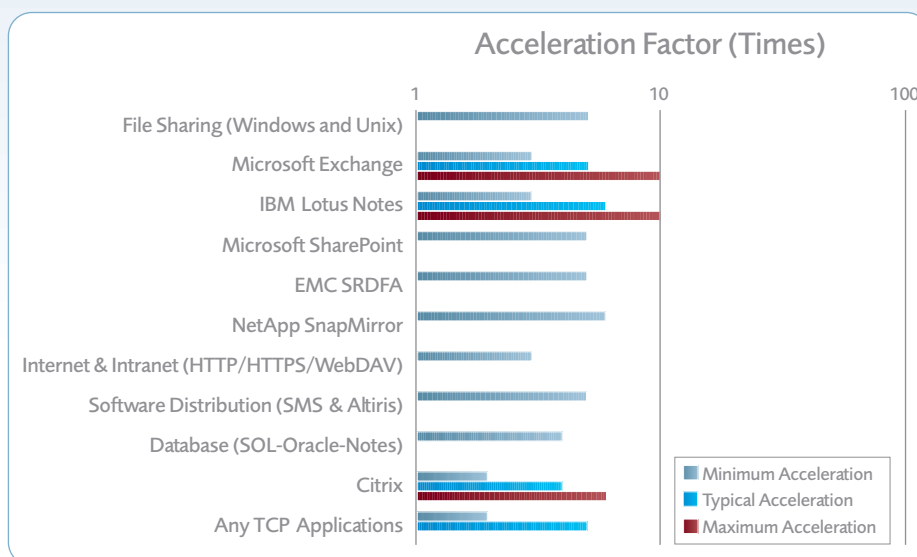
2) Configure Policies – then tune the WAN Optimisation solution and set policies to enhance the performance of critical applications and to effectively manage WAN bandwidth to prevailing application needs.

3) Monitor – review modified application improvements periodically and continue to benchmark prevailing application performance and bandwidth utilisation; modify policies as appropriate to prevailing needs.

Given the economic situation anything that provides more bang for your buck has to be a good thing and we believe WAN Optimisation is likely to be a critical technology in support of Enterprise IT strategies moving forward.

Jason Peach, Consultant Manager

Fig. C1 Illustrated Application Acceleration Factors – Minimum to Maximum Improvements



Cultivating a customer service culture

Customer satisfaction lies at the heart of any business relationship. Networks First delivers a high quality customer service demonstrating that the whole organisation – from account managers to the engineers delivering the service – is working for the customer.

The service delivery team communicates with partners in relation to incidents and the delivery of service to end users to ensure that customers and partners are satisfied with both service and performance.

Being separate from operations and sales allows Service Delivery an independent outlook of the situation and an objective view on resolution – the Service Delivery Manager puts himself in the shoes of the customer.

Development of services, customer care and the customer experience is crucial to the shaping of Networks First as is the continual customer feedback which we require to bring suggestions back into the business. Collectively, this allows Networks First to support our partners in delivering services that customers require to the highest quality.

Networks First believes a key way to achieve these results is through Business Take-On Meetings and regular Service Review Meetings.

Why have a BTO (Business Take-On) Meeting?

- To provide an opportunity for the operations team to gather information relevant to the particular partner or end user
- To provide a handover from Sales to operations as a way of confirming our understanding of the services to be delivered
- To enable Networks First to meet, and hopefully exceed, partner and customer expectations relating to our services
- To understand the customer's business needs and any specific issues likely to affect our ability to deliver service
- To understand who the key contacts are within the partner and customer organisations. This is of particular use for escalation back to the partner and / or customer.

Why have a Service Review Meeting?

- Review service performance against SLA
- Identify areas for improvement or development or any risks to the business
- Gain customer feedback, positive or negative
- Implement and update Service Improvement Plans
- Ad-hoc meetings may be arranged as required if there is a specific need.

Networks First is supporting service excellence with additional resource. Anne Hope, a valued member of the Service Desk will now be supporting Mike Morrison as Service Delivery Manager for Networks First's voice and converged customers.

If you have a customer or project you believe requires a BTO please contact your account manager who can assist.



Start spreading the word!

Do you have a customer win you would like to announce? Would you like to see an increase in press coverage?

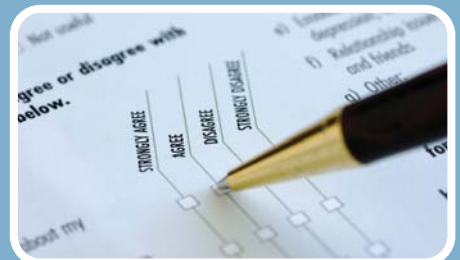
If you have answered yes to either of the above questions why not contact Networks First's Marketing Department to find out how we are able to assist. Networks First would like to help partners increase brand awareness for their organisations and the services they supply.

We are able to do this in a number of different ways but perhaps one of the easiest is through our press release programme. Our recent announcement of a new partnership received

coverage in publications such as IT director, IT Analysis and Comms Dealer Online whilst a joint press release about a new customer win received extensive coverage in a number of publications including CRN, Comms Business and MicroScope.

If you would like to announce a new customer win with Networks First we are happy to produce either a brief newsflash or an in-depth press release on your behalf. To find out more information about the process and what is involved please contact Alex Hodge on 0845 850 5577.

2009 Partner Survey



Networks First values the opinions of all its partners and is continually looking for ways to improve and develop its services. As a result, we launched the 2009 annual partner survey in May. This year's questionnaire focused on 'technology development' and gathering intelligence on areas you are receiving information requests on.

We would like to thank all the recipients who took the time to complete the questionnaire. These results have directly led Networks First to research new technology areas.

Networks First donated £5 for each completed survey to Breast Cancer Care, a charity for which one of Networks First's Sales Administrators is trying to raise £10,000.

Once the data has been fully analysed, results and actions will be published on the Networks First website. If you have any questions about the results of the survey please contact marketing@networksfirst.com who will be happy to assist.

A HISTORY OF NETWORKS FIRST

In 2010, Networks First will be celebrating its 20th year in business and has grown to become one of the leading partner focused support services organisations, with multi-vendor and mixed technology capabilities, in the UK.

How it all began...

Established in 1990, with funding from a small team of directors and private equity investment company, 3i, Networks First began its life as an integration business working directly with end users. With the enthusiasm and commitment of its small team of experts, it quickly began to build a reputation for its knowledge of 3Com's enterprise technology product set.

In 2000, 3Com's shock announcement to pull out of the enterprise product market meant that suddenly Networks First's entire business model was about to come tumbling down.

The majority of end users rushed towards 3Com's nearest competitor, Cisco and in 2001 Networks First was approached by two large organisations that were replacing 3Com networks to provide short-term maintenance support. These projects proved to be a hugely successful – and much needed – lifeline and gave Networks First an insight into the benefits which could be had from maintenance rather than product led business.

Slowly, Networks First began to rebuild its business on a service support basis and, whilst continuing to work with end users, also began to develop more working partnerships with system integrators and resellers.

In 2003/4, its senior management team took the opportunity to buy out 3i's shares in the business. With the company now wholly-owned by its working directors, there was an opportunity to take a closer look at what Networks First – and its people – really wanted the company to become. It was clear that it needed to rationalise its proposition and make a focused offering to the marketplace. The decision was made to no longer offer products such as cabling and to focus instead on building a new reseller-based sales model offering added value service support – the same model to which it works today.

Where we are today

Since then, the company hasn't looked back. Headquartered in the West Midlands, our highly trained engineers operate across the UK working with partners such as BT Global Services, Dell and Westcon Group. We provide the highest quality support to end users through our partners.

This superior level of support is backed up by a spares inventory in excess of £4.5m and a four-hour spares delivery guarantee. A computerised Service Desk, Network Operations Centre and Technical Assistance Centre are the nerve centre of our business.

The enthusiasm and expertise of our people – which is where it all began – has become an intrinsic part of Networks First's service delivery.

Moving Forward

Moving forward, Networks First has exciting and ambitious growth plans, with the aim to grow in to a £30m revenue business within the next five years. The company wants to bring greater harmony and synergy between the contracted services and professional services that we offer partners. We will continue to grow our professional services operation to

accommodate the increasing demand for our auditing and consultancy services as well as the rise in specific telephony and security offerings such as penetration testing and compliance standards. This will complement the ongoing development of our contracted services such as remote network management and inventory control, ensuring all of our services portfolio provides high value add, backed up by a strong commitment to our investment in emerging technologies.

It is these high quality value add services which will be key to ensuring we reach our targets, as will continuing to invest in building strategic alliances with the leading manufacturers and developing and strengthening our relationships with partners whose aspirations for delivering outstanding customer service and solutions reflect our own.



(from front page)

"Networks First is extremely pleased to be supporting Cisco in further strengthening and improving the level of support provided to its end users. However, we are keen to assure all partners that we are not changing our channel strategy and are still committed to being a partner focused organisation. Networks First has built its business on a channel only model – it would simply not make commercial sense for us to change to an end user model."

Networks First understands many partners will need help communicating this programme internally and has set up an educational information pack that will assist partners in explaining these changes to team members.

If you have any questions about the changes Networks First and Cisco are making, or would like assistance in setting up an educational workshop for your team, please do not hesitate to contact your Networks First account manager.

New Faces



Networks First is continuing to expand its team with the two latest new employees being Steve Mattocks in Service Delivery and Ross Porter in internal IT Development. Steve has worked in the IT industry for a number of years with excellent service desk experience whilst Ross joins us with a BSc in Business Information Technology from Birmingham City University.

Feedback

We're keen to hear your feedback on our newsletter and would welcome any ideas for content or your thoughts on the layout and style. Please contact the editor at : editor@networksfirst.com

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