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Mark Bodenham
Technology Operations Manager



Virgin Radio Significantly Improves Download Speeds and Site Performance Using F5's BIG-IP Local Traffic Manager with Compression



Industry:

Multimedia

Challenges:

- Accommodate increased site usage and traffic volumes
- Reduce management duties
- Improve reliability
- Secure media delivery and availability

Solution:

BIG-IP 6400 Local Traffic Manager with Compression module

Benefits:

- Scalability to meet new multimedia and content types
- Improved site performance
- Easy implementation and setup without downtime
- High availability and secure delivery of Windows Media Server and Audio services to Virgin Radio's listeners

Overview

When it launched in 1993, it became the UK's first national commercial pop and rock music station, and thirteen years later it's still the only national commercial pop and rock music station. Virgin Radio has always been seen as an innovator and trend setter and not long ago senior managers at the station decided to revamp its website to cater to the iPod generation with a host of new downloads, uploads, live streams and multimedia content.

As Mark Bodenham, Technology Operations Manager at Virgin Radio explains, "With a new wealth of online content, we expected a substantial increase in our online listeners and felt that we needed to upgrade our infrastructure to be able to offer the same level of quality and reliability that you would expect from radio."

The balancing and application traffic management of the old web infrastructure relied on a number of Cisco Local Directors that were running near capacity and which would be unable to meet the anticipated increase in usage and traffic volumes.

Another consideration for the team was the need to be able to exercise more control over the delivery of rich content such as video streaming,

which already places greater demands on web servers and which is likely to increase over time.

Bodenham and his team looked at a number of vendors and systems integrators based on the criteria of performance, proven track record, and an ability to scale to meet content delivery trends such as higher definition video or new multimedia content types.

Solution

"We considered a number of products but were particularly impressed by the technical performance of the F5 solution as well as its standing within Gartner's Magic Quadrant Report for Application Delivery Products that placed F5 as clear market leaders."

"We also had a great deal of faith in the competence of System Professional Ltd. who had a proven track record with other customers in the media sector," Bodenham adds.

System Professional Ltd. is based in East Sussex, with a customer base predominantly located across London and the South-East. The company, a fully accredited F5 Networks partner and a specialist application delivery networking provider, is skilled in IT project planning, design and implementation, with a comprehensive range of Storage,



Backup and Disaster Recovery solutions.

Following a number of tests, scoping and project planning sessions, Virgin Radio selected a high availability deployment consisting of a pair of BIG-IP 6400 Local Traffic Managers, each complemented with the BIG-IP Compression module to help streamline traffic across the WAN and Internet links.

With the system going from planning stage to full implementation in just two months, the F5 solution ensures both the high availability and secure delivery of Windows Media Server and Audio services to Virgin Radio's listeners.

"The project has been deemed a great success," said Bodenham. "We were impressed with the System Professional/F5 partnership and how the project was managed and delivered. Due to strict business demands, it was essential that the installation was seamless and didn't impact the day-to-day running of the Virgin Radio network systems. The F5 BIG-IP solution was delivered on time and with immediate performance benefits."

The solution has also greatly improved the resilience of the Virgin Radio website while providing an invaluable monitoring service that also serves to efficiently load balance the new podcast download facility.

"The website download speed has improved significantly, along with performance. There is a greater resilience of our media servers and increased reliability. All front line staff have benefited from the ease of management provided by the F5 solution," Bodenham added.

Following the success of the F5 implementation, the technology will now be extended to the Virgin Radio SQL servers. The audio servers and new streaming platforms will benefit from the high availability performance of the F5 solutions.

About Virgin Radio

Virgin Radio is the UK's only commercial pop and rock music station. It can be heard on 105.8FM in London, 1215AM nationwide, on any DAB Digital Radio, via Sky Digital, Freeview and the cable TV networks and via WorldSpace. Virgin Radio is the world's most listened to station on the internet and can be heard at www.virginradio.co.uk. Virgin Radio Classic Rock, Virgin Radio Xtreme and Virgin Radio Groove extend the brand across the internet and Sky nationally, and on DAB in London. Virgin Radio is wholly owned by SMG plc.

F5 Networks, Inc.
Corporate Headquarters
 401 Elliott Avenue West
 Seattle, WA 98119
 (206) 272-5555 Voice
 (888) 88BIGIP Toll-Free
 (206) 272-5556 Fax
www.f5.com
info@f5.com

F5 Networks
Asia-Pacific
 +65-6533-6103 Voice
 +65-6533-6103 Fax
info.asia@f5.com

F5 Networks, Ltd
Europe/Middle-East/Africa
 +44 (0)1932 582 000 Voice
 +44 (0)1932 582 001 Fax
emeainfo@f5.com

F5 Networks
Japan K.K.
 +81-3-5114-3200 Voice
 +81-3-5114-3201 Fax
info@f5networks.co.jp