Blue Coat Brings WAN Optimization to Road Warriors

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The new SG Client extends performance and security benefits to remote users, while improved traffic visibility and reporting ease management and help make a business case for application-acceleration technology, Blue Coat says.

The latest release of Blue Coat Systems' SG line of WAN optimization appliances, launched April 9, addresses a trend the company sees toward more strategic implementations.

Blue Coat added a new client capability to the software that extends the performance and security benefits of the SG appliances to individual users.

"If you are on the road and connecting to the Internet from a hotel or a Starbucks, you are a long distance from your application, so you need acceleration, but you are outside the control of the security mechanisms your enterprise might have in place. So you need to enhance the performance and control of that asset," said Chris King, director of strategic marketing for Blue Coat, in Sunnyvale, Calif.

The first version of the SG Client, which is the first deliverable of a new architecture Blue Coat announced late in 2006, focuses on improved application performance for laptop users or users accessing applications from a home PC.

Specifically, the new client, shipping now, provides CIFS (Common

Internet File System) object caching and protocol optimization, TCP optimization, and compression, and it works with existing customer VPNs.

The next release of the SG Client, due in the fall of 2007, will add more acceleration techniques for more applications, performance monitoring and content filtering.

To make the SG appliances easier to deploy and manage, Blue Coat allowed them to operate in transparent and translucent tunnel modes to make IP addresses and NetFlow ports visible for routing schemes, firewalls and network management tools such as those that gather Cisco Systems Layer 4 NetFlow statistics.

The increased visibility addresses a problem introduced by most WAN optimization techniques, according to King. "Customers have existing management tools and infrastructure that depend on Layer 3 or 4 information, but most WAN optimizations obscure that information flow, and policy-based routing schemes don't work because WAN optimization tools use tunnels that obscure all that information," he said.

Blue Coat also improved reporting for the SG appliances by creating a dashboard that shows how much compression and acceleration each application is getting. By showing the improvement in traffic speed, the dashboard makes it easier to "articulate the business case for deploying this enterprisewide," King said.

To improve availability, Blue Coat also added dynamic clustering techniques in which a pool of SG appliances is aware of any SG appliance added to the pool and can automatically reassign workloads. No provisioning changes are required and appliances as they are added will "understand" their role in the pool or cluster.

To improve the security of a network of SG appliances, Blue Coat added a new digital birth certificate to each appliance that incorporates its unique serial number. With that digital birth certificate, "We now have the ability to create a fully authenticated and authorized WAN optimization network, because we can authenticate the box you are going use to create a WAN optimization network," King said.

This also "gives us the ability to nail up encrypted tunnels between the appliances" to protect data when the application doesn't provide its own encryption, King said.

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