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Symitar Uses Network Boxes to Pass on Products, Efficiencies

Silver Peak Box Expands WAN Capacity, Helps Credit Unions Leave Magnetic Tape Behind

By Marc Rapport

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Silver Peak Systems appliances can accelerate a wide-access network.

Small boxes sitting on the network at a Symitar data center in Missouri are helping the core processor's client credit unions improve internal efficiencies while the company works to wean its client base off traditional magnetic tape, the company said.

The Jack Henry & Associates subsidiary is using the Silver Peak Systems appliances to accelerate its own wide-access network, allowing it to continue pushing out new products without weighing down the WAN, said Rick Phillips, Symitar product manager.

That's only part of the story, though. The optimized network performance also allows for dramatically improved data backup times, Phillips said, crucial for both disaster recovery and routine data storage.

As credit unions grow, handling their data storage requirements and just their own burgeoning use of network bandwidth can present a growing problem, too, Phillips said.

"It can really be problematic," he said. "We had one particular credit union that found it was taking them so long to move data from its primary site to its backup site that it was basically rendering their backup software package inoperable. Having a 12- to 13-hour backup just isn't going to work."

Phillips said the WAN optimization boxes it now uses is giving it 10 to 20 times the performance capabilities on the same amount of bandwidth. "That allows us to also sell or move more of our solutions out to our client credit unions without increasing their external costs," the Symitar product manager said.

The collective power of credit unions working together at a single site also is reflected here, Phillips said. "It would be way too expensive for credit unions to individually buy this kind of bandwidth. Silver Peak allows us to offer these services at a reasonable price," he said.

The appliances use three real-time techniques to optimize network performance, said Larry Cormier, senior vice president of worldwide marketing for Silver Peak in Santa Clara, Calif.

Network acceleration improves application response by minimizing the effects of latency. Network integrity is improved by adaptive forward error correction technology that mitigates data packet loss and reduces the need for retransmissions through oversubscribed routers. Network memory technology, meanwhile, inspects WAN traffic at the byte level and stores copies in high-capacity disk drives, Cormier said.

Phillips said the Silver Peak system allows the core processor to provide the bandwidth needed to move large amounts of backup data offsite relatively inexpensively, providing for both failover and backup storage functionality.

"May of our clients are now using file servers to do two tapeless backups a night – one for failover and one for historical data retention. They need to do that anyway for NCUA purposes but that can really add up fast when you're talking about 20, 30, 40 gigabytes at a time," Phillips said.

The WAN optimization also allows the core processor to pursue a strategy of encouraging credit unions to abandon traditional magnetic tape backups.

"We are absolutely pushing credit unions as much as we can into a tapeless environment," the Symitar product manager said. "We definitely don't want to deal with tapes anymore.

Simplicity also is a strong point, Phillips said.

"We can take a credit union, regardless of how many people are working there or programs they're running and just found what size bandwidth they have and then we can work with them," he said. "That's not true with a lot of these other appliances."

Cormier said his company's solutions are now in place at more than 3,000 mostly small to medium-sized enterprises across numerous verticals, including state and local government, universities, manufacturing and financial services.

He said Silver Peak's development efforts continue to focus on improving performance for both individual applications and network layers. And while about 95% of the deployments use physical appliances, the company also has launched a virtual version for users of the VMware platform.

"We see a lot of enterprises moving to a virtual environment and we needed to give them that option from us, too," Cormier.

Symitar, meanwhile, also is working with its client base to deploy the Silver Peak technology in their own shops. "We did a survey and 110 credit unions responded," Phillips said. Their biggest bandwidth consumers tended to be voice over IP, video and Citrix networks and the latency and data loss in the lines causing performance issues, he said.

"Silver Peak addresses that where every other vendor we looked at bypasses it," Phillips said.

As for cost, Phillips said a credit union, for example, running on 4 megs or less through a T1 or T3 pipe can invest about $10,000 and find itself with 50-meg performance "without paying anything additional to the telephone company."

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