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Virtual WAN optimization proves less taxing on firm's VDI environment

To keep its [virtual desktops](#) functioning at high performance during its peak season, tax preparation firm SurePrep decided [virtual WAN optimization](#) would be the best way to share resources in service centers across the globe.

SurePrep's IT needs are unusual, because its resources are dedicated to making everything run flawlessly during a short period when tax season is in full swing.

"Our peak season is five days a year," said Will Hosek, SurePrep's vice president of information technology.

Hosek said SurePrep goes from about 50 servers during most of the year to more than 100 during tax season. The Newport Beach, Calif., company has a 200-seat service center in Irvine, Calif., and another 200-seat center in Mumbai, India. Both service centers run virtual desktops with Wyse Technology Inc.'s [Remote Desktop Protocol](#) (RDP)-based thin clients.

"That provides an excellent method for people on opposite sides of the globe to collaborate," Hosek said.

The [VDI environment](#) also provides some network bandwidth bottlenecks, however. "We had a situation where the people in Mumbai suffered from issues with screen refreshes and overall performance when trying to access information in large documents," Hosek said. "It's a matter of how quickly documents could refresh going page to page. A 400-page document can really slow you down."

Hosek said SurePrep could solve the problem with WAN optimization, but he wanted to avoid buying hardware devices just to deal with a problem that exists for a very short time period. And the company had no IT staff in Mumbai, which could complicate installation and management.

"One obstacle was buying a piece of physical hardware with no way to prove how well it would work, and ship it off to Mumbai and hope it works," Hosek said. "If it doesn't work, we have to ship it back. We had to find out quickly if this would work for us, or else we had to do something else."

That something else was a VX virtual appliance for [WAN optimization](#) from Silver Peak Systems Inc. SurePrep installed a trial version on a [VMware ESX](#) server running in its Mumbai center. "We tried it out and got an immediate performance boost," he said.

He then implemented it in Irvine, which had less severe refresh problems.

"We don't have to manage a physical device," Hosek said of the software approach. "I wouldn't say it's a critical piece of our network, but we certainly would suffer because of people not being able to do their job. The nice thing about a virtual device is, if something goes wrong with the

server hardware, we can use a generic server. We just bring out a spare, reload it and go about our business.”

Silver Peak has sold its WAN optimization as a virtual appliance for little more than a year, and in March it began offering a free 30-day trial license for the 1 Gbps appliance. Customers can download the software from the Silver Peak website. Silver Peak CEO Rick Tinsley said he expects the virtual WAN optimization appliance to make up the bulk of its sales eventually.

“Other people who sell WAN optimization prefer to sell boxes,” Tinsley said. “We can get a leg up by offering customers a different way to implement these products. Customers can deploy these all over the world. With physical boxes, you have to ship the product, get it physically installed, and in some cases it has to go through customs. Compare that to downloading a piece of software, installing it on your hardware and getting it up and running more quickly and economically.”

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