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Asdrubal Pichardo
Global Director IT
Enterprise Networking

SAP Replaces Previous VPN Technology with F5’s FirePass® SSL VPN Solution, Ensuring Secure Remote Access for Nearly 7,000 Users Daily

Industry:

Software

Challenges:

- Remote access for 7,000+ employees
- High support costs
- Application security

Benefits:

- Reduced support issues by 50%
- Easy to use
- Fast, secure access to applications for over 7,000 employees on a daily basis

Overview

When SAP was looking for a solution to replace their previous VPN technology, they chose the FirePass® device from F5. The FirePass device allowed SAP to overcome the limitations and complexity of their previous solution, and provide secure remote access to their employees from any location, using any type of device. While nearly 7,000 SAP employees access applications through the FirePass device every day, the number of VPN related support issues has decreased by 50%.

Challenge

SAP wanted to provide remote access to corporate applications to all employees, whether they were working out of the home office, a sales person at a client site performing a demo, or a consultant at a customer site who needed to connect back to gain access to required files. These employees needed to consistently and securely connect to any application, using any type of device – from PC to Mac to PocketPC – anywhere in the world.

The problem in doing this for a growing number of users on the road, according to Asdrubal Pichardo, SAP Global Director IT Enterprise Networking, was the lack of capabilities in the remote access product that was already in place.

“We’ve had a VPN technology solution for years, but it’s becoming less and less likely that it will allow you to connect from many client or customer sites,” said Pichardo. “This is especially true at government sites. It’s a productivity hit for traveling employees if they can’t access the network from any location.”

Solution

The SAP team augmented their remote access solution with F5’s FirePass, an SSL VPN device that provides secure remote access to corporate applications and data via standard Web browser technology. It enabled SAP to extend secure remote access to anyone connected to the Internet using desktops, laptops, PDAs, kiosks and more – while eliminating the need for complex IPsec VPNs.

FirePass was also the first SSL VPN solution with complete cross-platform support. Extending its support for any IP application to Macintosh, PocketPC and Linux clients and expanding client and application security for Web, email and file application access, FirePass delivers the industry’s most ubiquitous solution for secure application access.





According to Pichardo, the SAP sales organization also (and obviously) required fast and secure remote access while on the road, but had grown frustrated with the previous solution they'd been using, a client-based SSL VPN.

"Performing demos at a remote location was difficult because you may be asked to demo from the prospect's PC, requiring client installation along with all of the setup and time that this took," he said. "FirePass gives us a completely clientless solution, so sales people can quickly connect back to SAP and run the demo, without installing anything on the customer's PC."

"And those demos we run through FirePass are revenue-generating," added Pichardo. "We run some remote training classes through it – that's definitely revenue-generating, as well as the work that our consultants perform at customer sites. The FirePass product supports these revenue generating activities."

For Pichardo, the difference in the time he and his team spent supporting their previous remote access solutions and F5's FirePass SSL VPN solution was dramatic.

"We've seen probably a 50% drop in the number of trouble tickets we receive since implementing FirePass," said Pichardo. "For my team, it's no longer necessary for them to take up a portion of their day supporting the VPN. I'd say we've cut that time by 50% with FirePass."

Additionally, a lot of mission-critical applications are being accessed through FirePass, according to Pichardo, by a lot of users, worldwide.

"We run every application through FirePass, and it works just fine," he said. "I haven't seen anything that we haven't been able to run through it for our users."

And, needless to say, there are a lot of users. Pichardo estimates that of the global workforce of 30,000 people, who all have access to FirePass, half of them use it on a weekly basis – and nearly 7,000 people access applications through FirePass on a daily basis. Yet all of that data flowing back and forth remains secure.

"One of the great things about FirePass is that it cleans up the session after the user is done on a public system, like kiosks, which

are popping up everywhere," said Pichardo. "Nothing is left on the cache and there's nothing on that PC that would indicate the user was ever there."

FirePass also supports global multi-site clustering. The appliances can be clustered to support up to 20,000 concurrent connections on a single URL, without users experiencing any performance degradation. SAP has deployed FirePass globally across multiple sites, with multiple clusters in North America, Europe, Asia and Japan. In addition, FirePass devices can be configured for hot, stateful failover between yoked pairs of servers (an active server and a standby server), without session interruption or termination. This means that in the unlikely event of a server failure, all session data is preserved and the failover to the backup unit is invisible to the user.

Finally, Pichardo, like everyone else at SAP, likes the familiar, easy-to-use interface FirePass affords to end users around the world.

"It truly is easy to use," he said. "You just bookmark the website, make it your home page, and you're in. I've got immediate access – it's right there. It's great."

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