ARX Config, Day One

Don MacVittie, 2010-18-01

Well I'm putting my new ARX through the paces on my network, starting today with the base config and try number one at setting up the shares.

This is an ARX 500, which is more than enough for our needs, and gives us a platform to start testing different ideas out on. To quote Lori when I told her I had all the ports communicating, "Now make it do something impressive".

The point of this blog series is to give me a chance to play with my new toy and give you all an idea of what the ARX can do. I've got a few goals in mind for this box, but want to make certain I'm not asking too much before listing them for you. So we'll just walk through configuring it to handle my two NAS boxes (and possibly one linux share – but more on that later, it's for an advanced use case), and start tiering. While the two NAS boxes are roughly equivalent, I do have one as a primary and one as secondary storage today, we're just making that distinction with hand copies, and we would love the ARX to handle tiering for us. That's the baseline. After that there is some replication I'm interested in, and some scripts and and and… I get ahead of myself ;-).

Today had a couple of snags – I hate it when hardware is designed so that the cable condom – that little piece of rubber over the clip on the Ethernet plug – catches when you unplug the Ethernet cable. Having worked for Network Computing, I can tell you plenty of vendors have this issue on their 1U box, and honestly if you check the hardware configuration guide *before* plugging in CAT5 all willy-nilly, this won't be much of a problem for you (I had the in-band mgmt port plugged in, but initial config must be through the out-of-band mgmt port. RTFM'd, and used a knife to remove the plug, and all was well).

And that's the first out-of-the-box impression I have. In several cases things that I assumed were not true. The manuals are astonishing (no, that's not employee-speak or I wouldn't have mentioned the Ethernet jack thing) by any standard, but that's good, because you're going to need them. I've configed a couple of hundred storage devices, maybe more than a thousand, and this one got me a few times already – all minor stuff, and all makes perfect sense once you know what the designers were thinking. Thankfully, with a full documentation set on Ask F5 (login required), you'll have no problem breezing through these issues.

I'm going to spend a couple of hours a day playing with this box to get it configured just the way I want/need it, and I'll write at least a bit each night about my experiences. I would love to play enterprise IT guy and spend a day or two in ARX-land, but we have a lot of other stuff going on, and a nice side benefit is that you all get these blogs in bite-sized chunks. A fellow Twitterer reminded me of the massive spiral bound training document that I brought home from Boston (where ARX is made/maintained/whatever you call it) last year, and while it's got some good information in it, I'm happy with the documentation on Ask F5 thus far, it's more crisp because it's not formatted for training, but once it's fully configured and running in my environment, there were some tricks in that book I'd like to try.

Why did I stop where I did? I toyed with actually importing shares and creating a Virtual, but deleted them all and decided to wait because there are some fundamental questions I need to dig up answers to before taking those steps – like where is the best place to have the ARX put its meta-data and if a share can be accessed with both CIFS and NFS, what are the benefits of turning on both, one, or the other through the ARX? Also want to look at our infrastructure and see about locking down the share IPs so that they must be accessed via the ARX, a trick that I have heard of and finally get to try out. Feels all FC to run everything through the switch, but saves scanning disks for changes, something that bears a large cost if a few NAS devices' interfaces can be slightly modded to avoid it.

But that's for another day. For tonight I'll just leave you with a screen shot of the web UI, for those who've never seen it…
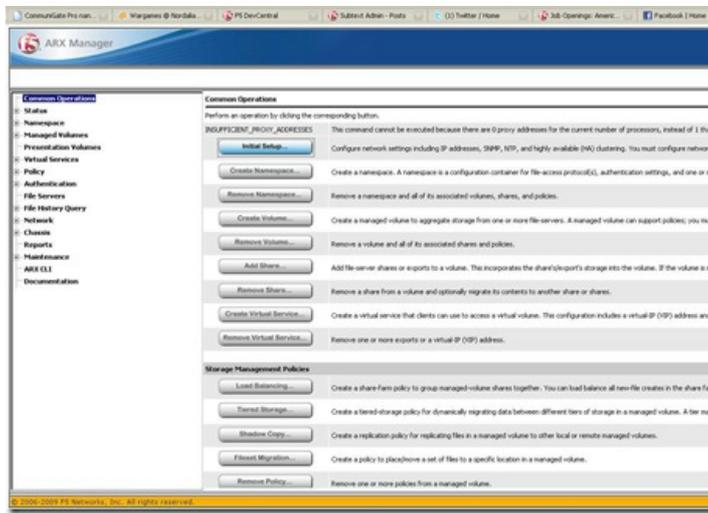
If that posts like it looks in Windows Live Writer, it's too small to read. This was taken just before doing the web configuration, so only the configuration option is available. Once it was completed then several other options became available, and as I said, I played with them, but deleted everything I'd done because I want to paw through the manuals and get answers to my questions first.

To be honest, having dabbled in both CIFS and NFS protocol-level development, I'm just impressed that it can proxy both. Sometimes a little knowledge gives you a lot of respect for those who have more :-).

Until next time,

Don.