

Does Your Infrastructure Have An Air-Filled Lego Man?

Don MacVittie, 2011-01-02

In a couple of unrelated bouts of cleaning – one to show The Toddler my Boy Scout sash, which required going through boxes in the basement until I found it, and the other attempting to dig a toy out from under the stove, which required pulling the stove out from the wall and cleaning under it in one of those scenarios where once you've seen it, you have to clean it, I found some unexpected bits.

In the box that contained my Boy Scout sash, I found the tire pressure gauge that I've been vaguely looking for over the last few years. Oh sure, I replaced it, they're not that expensive, but where does a tire pressure gauge get off to? Well apparently in a box with Eagle Scout awards, army unit patches, college banners, and a host of other memorabilia. This must have seemed like a logical place to put it at the time, perhaps I had one of the Marvin The Martian figures also in the box holding it when I packed the box up.

Under the stove I found a Lego man. He looks to have pieces from several old Lego Men on him actually, and no doubt a collector could tell you which sets each piece came from. I'm no collector, so I'll leave it as "Lego Man". The way that The Toddler's two year old niece runs around throwing Lego Men, I'll assume it was her, though it could have been The Toddler himself or any number of other relatives that visit him. The only things he's missing is a hat or hair, and optionally something to hang on to. The Toddler's oldest brother was a Lego nut, and you can find all sorts of odd things to put in their hands in the gigantic "Box O' Lego Parts" that The Toddler inherited.



Having found these two things in two days, they were naturally tossed in the same place. And when I went to take care of them, I discovered an interesting thing... The tire pressure gauge fits exactly onto the connector for a hat or a hairpiece. At first I found this outrageously funny, and even have a picture for your viewing pleasure.

The thing is, it appears to fit, and it fills the requirement of covering up the raw connector on the Lego Man's head, but in the setting the Lego Man was designed for, it would not be terribly useful. In the setting the tire pressure gauge is designed for, it would be downright inconvenient.

There are many things in life that fit this description – that work for the short-term but long term just don't prove themselves out, or are too unique to be of general usefulness. The more complex the topic, the more this statement is true. Many scientific theories look good until exposed to the overall world and a greater problem set than the one that they were designed for. Once they are generalized these theories tend to be not terribly useful and sometimes downright inconvenient (for the authors at least).

The same is true of toys you outgrow. Several years ago, my parents bought my brother and I a Rock'em Sock'em Robots set as a joke. We fought it out for their pleasure and promptly turned it over to our children, who have a different set of needs in their toys. Lucky for my parents that the two of us still knew what to do with a toy that had no batteries and didn't cut or puncture things, but even though we knew how to play, we'd outgrown them.

Your datacenter might well have these same items in them. If you're hobbling along with a load balancer (a valid tool) and a whole bunch of software or hardware to protect and speed your applications (another valid tool), your datacenter might look alarmingly like the above pictured Lego Man. While load balancing is a needed function, the ability to do much more than load balance – ala Application Delivery Controllers (ADCs) means you can take out the equivalent of the air pressure gauge and replace it with the much-more-useful equivalent of a hat or helmet.

The same is true of growth and the potential to outgrow systems or infrastructure components as your datacenter grows. Sometimes an outsourced service or a simple load balancer is enough to get you through the growth stages of a company, but then hits stagnation at a certain point. It still does what you originally acquired it for – balancing load between servers for example – but you’ve grown beyond that into much more sophisticated needs or higher throughput.



That’s a good time to take a good long look at an ADC. By way of disclosure, if there’s anyone left reading my blog that doesn’t know, [F5](#) makes ADCs, so this could be viewed as a gratuitous plug, but as (almost) always, I’m talking about the ADC market, not our specific products. An ADC does the load balancing bit, it also does a host of other things from TCP acceleration to rule-based routing and high availability.

So if your datacenter has a Lego Man, or you’ve out-grown your manually-maintained Rock’em Sock’em Robots, it’s time to step up and look into the state of the art. F5 offers a trial version of their product – [LTM VE](#), and I know at least some other ADC vendors do also, meaning you can throw one in and see if it works for you. If it doesn’t, you’ve lost nothing but a few hours. If it does, you’ve gained a lot – greater adaptability, greater security, and greater potential to act on the intelligence embedded in your IT network. We like to call it IT Agility, your way.

I’m not predicting doom and gloom or anything, but I thought it would be funny to say that your datacenter might end up looking like that set of Rock’em Sock’em Robots my brother and I received. You see, I won the championship bout, and the award was of course that I “got to” take the game home with me. It is now in the hands of The Toddler, and the picture at right shows the current state of the game. This could be a warning about what happens if you don’t keep up your infrastructure, or a warning to hire good employees that are old enough to utilize the tools you provide for them... Your decision which suits your organization better.

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