

It is Never Easy, But There's a Lot of Change Going On.



Don MacVittie, 2011-01-03

Every spring I get excited. I live in Wisconsin, which my travels have shown me you may not understand. I have actually been told “that is not your house, there is snow on the ground. All of America is sun and beaches”. Well, in Wisconsin, it gets cold. Moscow style cold. There are a couple of weeks each winter where going out is something you do only after bundling up like a toddler... Mittens, hats, coat, another coat, boots... But then spring comes, and once the temperature gets to the point where the snow starts to melt, the sun starts to feel warm again. It's at that point that I start to get that burst of energy, and every year it surprises me. I realize that I was, toward the end of the winter, slowing down. Not work-wise, but home-wise. You can't do too much work outside, there are days I didn't even break down boxes for recycling because it was too cold in the (unheated) garage. So inside things take precedence. This year it was staining some window frames, helping [Lori](#) get her monstrous new fishtank set up, and working on some fun stuff I'd been sitting on.



I register a very similar surprise in IT, even though, just like winter, it is a predictable cycle. The high-tech industry just keeps turning out new ideas, products, and hype cycles.

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But this round seems different to me. Instead of a rush of new followed by a predictable lull while enterprises digest the new and turn it into functional solutions, it seems that, even given the global economy, the new just keeps coming. From Server Virtualization to Server Consolidation to Storage Virtualization to Primary Dedupe, through network virtualization and the maturity of load balancers into ADCs, then the adaptation of the best ADCs into tools to manage virtualization sprawl. Throwing in Cloud, then Cloud Storage, and heaping network convergence (with storage networks) onto the heap, and then drop the mobile device bomb... Wow. It's been a run.

IT has always had the belief that the only constant is change, but the rate of change seems to be in high gear over the last several years. The biggest problem with that is none of this stuff exists in a vacuum, and you don't really get the opportunity to digest any of it and make it an integral part of your architecture if you're doing it all. F5 and several other companies have some great stuff to help you take the bull by the horns, ours being instantiated as what we call Strategic Points of Control, but they too require time and effort.

The theory is, of course, that we're going to a better place, that IT will be more adaptable and less fragile. That needs to be in your sights at all times if you are participating in several of these changes at the same time, but also in your sites *must* be the short term – don't make your IT less adaptable and more fragile today on the promise of making it less so in the future. And that's a serious risk if you move too fast. That is a lot of change in your systems, and while I've talked about them individually, an architecture plan (can you tell I was an Enterprise Architect once?) that coordinates the changes you're making and leaves breathing space so you can make the changes a part of your systems is a good idea. I'm not saying drag your feet, but I am saying that the famous saying “He who defends everything defends nothing” has an IT corollary “He who changes everything risks everything”.



Do we here at F5 want you to buy our products? Of course we do. We wouldn't make them if we didn't think they rocked. Do we want you to redesign your network on-the-fly on a Sunday night from one end to the other? Not if it risks you failing. We look bad if you look bad because of us. So take your time, figure out which of the many new trends holds the most promise *for your organization*, prioritize, then implement. Make sure you know what you have before moving on to the next change. Many of you have stable virtualized server environments already, so moving on from there is easier, but many of you do not yet have stability in virtualization. [VMWare](#) and others make some great tools to help with managing your virtualized environment, but only if you've been in the virtualization game long enough to realize

you need them.

Where will we end up? I honestly don't know. For sure with highly virtualized datacenters, and with much shortened lead times for IT to implement new systems. Perhaps we'll end up 100% in the cloud, but there are inherent risks that make 100% doubtful – like outsourcing, you're only as good as the date on your contract. So the future is cloudy, pun intended.

So take your time, I've said it before, and will likely say it again, we're here to help, but we want to help, not help shove you over the cliff. Good vendors will still be around if you delay implementation of some new architectural wonder by six weeks or six months to stabilize the one you just implemented, and the vendors that aren't around? Well, imagine if you'd bought into them. :-) Another old adage that has new meaning at the current rate of change is "Anything worth doing is worth doing right". Of course there will be politics in many of the most recent round of changes – pressure to do it faster – can't help you there other than to suggest you point out that the difference between responsive and reckless is directly related to the pressure applied.

My big kick is at the moment is access to cloud storage from your local network. Big bang for the buck whether you're using our [ARX](#) Cloud Extender or one of the various cloud storage gateways out there, it gives you a place to move stuff that means you don't have to back it up, but you don't have to risk losing it either.

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