Next-Generation Management of Data Centers Should be Modeled on Social Networking

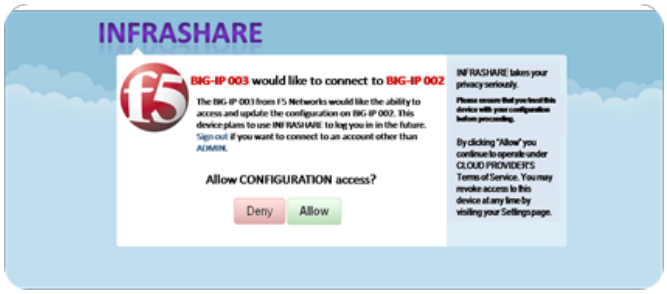
Lori MacVittie, 2009-04-12

Should the next generation management of network and application network devices look and act more like Facebook and Twitter? Infrastructure 2.0 could take us there.

You may think I'm kidding and certainly I make this proposal with some amount of humorous intent, but there is some value, I think, in applying the concepts of Web 2.0 and social networking to network management systems (NMS).

There's a reason it's called social ***networking***, after all. It's modeled closely on ***networking*** and NMS is primarily about managing not just individual network and application network devices, but on managing the relationships between them. "Dependencies" are often included in NMS applications to better visualize and traverse the myriad relationships between network, application network, storage, and applications that make up the data center infrastructure. Understanding which devices are "friends" and which are "followers" is nothing new to NMS and IT professionals who spend their days mired inside these applications.

I occasionally see tweets and press releases regarding new versions of this NMS solution or that, but even the newer ones are all very focused on doing the same old thing with a dash of "cloud" for flavor. If we're going to completely and potentially irrevocably change the style of computing, shouldn't we change our methods of management, too?



Wouldn't it be nice if you could use mechanisms similar to OAuth to connect various devices together and on a granular basis permit the exchange of configuration – relevant polices, for example? And wouldn't it be even nicer if that exchange could be mediated automatically? When BIG-IP 003 "tweets" a configuration update – such as the launch of a new virtual instance of an application - it is picked up by its followers (including BIG-IP 002) and triggers the appropriate update on ***its*** configuration. Facebook style Walls could substitute for text-based log files and provide many of the same features as Web 2.0 and social networking sites do today: sharing with other systems, tagging, marking for later perusal, etc…

Example: you're perusing through your Apache "Wall". You see in the log an HTTP request that is obviously an attempt to exploit a vulnerability. You click the "SHARE" button and are presented with a list of all your "network" friends. You choose your firewall/web application firewall and options are immediately presented as to the kind of sharing you want to do. You choose "create a policy to block this IP" and WHAM! No more exploitable requests from ***that*** IP address. It's the virtual patching that White Hat Security has been doing for years married to Facebook. Awesome powerful stuff there.

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