Storage? We bought Storage?

Don MacVittie, 2007-13-08

Okay, having been the Storage and Servers Editor for the (now defunct) pre-eminent networking geek magazine, I've been feeling like I should say something about our purchase of Acopia Networks. The reason I haven't yet is twofold -

1. I found out we had made an offer when you did (or could have), and by the same manner you did - Mr. McAdams' press release.

2. I wanted to understand how Acopia "fit" with us, and how that effected DevCentral.

I can (and have!) blog for days straight about storage, its market, and the special issues of that market. Just my belief that smart enterprises don't want or need multi-tiered storage in the age of RAID and replication, and my further belief that the storage industry fails when they don't understand that fact could take up pages and spawn some interesting conversations, but I'll keep this on-point for the most part.

In the long term, we at F5 are working on building even higher reliability. Lori was right in her blog post in that sense, but I'm going to take that and run with it from a DevCentral perspective.

Most people view the importance of iRules and iControl to be in allowing customers to do things that networking vendors can't foresee, things that are focal to your architecture and your organization. That's true, but I like to add the tiny little caveat on there that reducing your workload is at least as important. IT staffs are small and networks seem ever bigger. Anything to avoid one more call or cut one hour out of the week for you all is a worthwhile endeavor, in my opinion. Couched in terms of "one less body" or "increased productivity", it's worthwhile to management also. And that's a balance we have to walk, right? The job has to get done, but you can't get burned out doing it.

So my focus is on the future. I can't talk to the folks over at Acopia until the deal closes, so this is just me, knowing both spaces, offering you possibilities... Things we could be doing in a relatively short time.

It's two AM and a server goes down with errors on its NAS. BIG-IP takes it out of the pool, and you get a call, right? But what if iControl could get notified instead, and an iControl application automatically points the server at the replica that Acopia has been producing. Or better yet, an iControl App tells Acopia to move the mountpoint to the replica so that nothing changes on the server. You stay in bed, the system stays at peak efficiency, on Monday morning you go figure out what happened to the NAS. Everyone's happy.

It's your day off and there's a rush on your servers. Seeing too much traffic, they start to struggle to keep up. You get a call. Or an iRule notices the problem and tells iControl that it needs another server. iControl pulls a machine that is online but not associated with any of your web applications up, points it at the NAS storage that this web application uses, then adds it to the pool for the application in question. Load reduces. Blade servers do this sort of thing within their frame - Egenera has had this capability within their BladeFrame for quite a while now... But only within the frame. BIG-IP could do it for your data center.

Throughput on a given pool has dropped so that servers are seeing a very low utilization for that pool, but another web application - served by a different pool - is struggling to keep up. An iControl application takes one member out of the pool that has low utilization, points its NAS connection at a different Acopia mount point, and adds the machine into the overburdened pool. Self adjusting resources, brought to you by F5 with Acopia.

These are really just three examples of a self-aware, self-healing network that Acopia helps us enable. The next while on the DevCentral team should be fun as we figure out even more ways to make these two technologies work together to add value for you.

I enjoy storage nearly as much as I enjoy F5, so for me this is a great challenge, and I'm looking forward to figuring out ways to make your life easier. Frankly, my time in IT and IT Management left me with an "if it can be automated reliably, automate it" attitude, and that's where I see Acopia helping out a lot. We can do a lot of things, but like Lori tried to say, your webapps aren't any more reliable than the disk they run on. Unless "disks they run on" can be expanded to include several NAS boxes, some RAID and some Replication... RAID is handled by the NAS vendors and smart folks like you, I guess we'll get the rest ;-).

That's it for now, have some other items to look in on.

Don.

Reading: Re-reading Panzer Aces II, Franz Kurowski

Imbibing: Mountain Dew