

# Technical Options. Opportunity and Confusion



Don MacVittie, 2010-02-11

One of the things that I love about technology is the fact that every time there is a problem, five solutions crop up to solve it. One of the things I hate about technology is the fact that every time there is a problem, five solutions crop up to solve it... And there are marketing geeks and pundits willing to tell you which one to choose before you even know that you have the problem.



I was out in Anaheim last week with F5's rockstar salesforce, telling them about the Future of IT. Or trying to, you'll have to ask them if I imparted any worthwhile information, since I haven't seen evaluations of my presentations yet. One thing that struck me from the ensuing discussions though is that there are people in IT who know their stuff, but are still confused about what solutions are best for long-distance problems. The sales team told me repeatedly that their customers sometimes are uncertain of their needs when talking about access control and acceleration.

They of course got the F5-biased, product laden answers, I'll skip that for you all here and just mention that "F5 has products in each of these spaces – talk to your sales folks". Though I've included the F5 product list in this article's tags if you want an idea what to talk with sales people about.

Remote office communications are often slowed by the need for a WAN connection to the home datacenter. They also have more precise security requirements than your average Internet connection – you need to know that those accessing your applications from the remote office actually have the rights to do so, since most often remote office users have access to your core systems. So you need an SSL VPN and/or application level authentication, along with something to make those connections speedy. Normally this would be Application Acceleration, but you might possibly also require [WAN optimization](#) if there is a lot of repetitive data being thrown across the line. If you're not using an SSL VPN, then you need some form of secure tunnel over the line between remote office and datacenter – after all, locking down both ends does you no good if you're unencrypted in the middle.

I didn't get a picture of any of my sessions,  
so you'll have to settle for this PowerPoint image

Datacenter to datacenter communications are less user intensive, and thus less browser intensive, so the benefit of Application Acceleration is less, and the benefit of WAN Optimization is commensurately greater. You still need secure connections, but perhaps not an SSL VPN – you might, it all depends upon how the secondary data center systems are managed. If they're managed from the primary datacenter, then you probably want to have an SSL VPN just to put something between the ne'er-do-wells and your systems. Otherwise, secure, encrypted tunnels to transfer data will do the trick. Of course there are a lot of considerations here, and you know your systems better than anyone else, so consider how many remote logins the remote datacenter has, and that will give you an idea if you need an SSL VPN.

For users hitting your website, the requirements are closer to a remote office, but not quite so stringent. You'll still want an application firewall, and you'll want to speed things up in a manner that won't impact browsers negatively – faster is only useful if the page remains unchanged from your implementation. So Application Acceleration and a web application firewall should do the trick. My experience with application acceleration is that you want a tool that has a lot of knobs and dials because no two websites are the same. You'll want to exclude some content from acceleration, tweak the settings on other content, etc.

And with all of these solutions you'll want frequent updates (particularly to firewalls), and a world-class service organization because the products sit right in your line of production and you don't want to waste a ton of time figuring out what's going wrong or waiting for replacement parts.

We're not the only vendor on the planet that offers you solutions in these spaces, so check out the market. Of course I think ours are the best – if I didn't, I'd be off working where I DID think they were the best. But every organization is different, find a vendor (or some vendors) that suit your organization's needs the best.

And check to see how they support cloud, because it is coming to a datacenter near you.



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