

Enterprise VA from 'Loadbalancer.org'



PRODUCT REVIEW PRODUCT

Whether you require an extra server to improve performance, to handle extra capacity or to create resilience, those servers need to be managed. Application servers are managed internally by the hosted application, but user generated traffic also needs to be managed, and resilience can help to maximise service availability.

Server load balancing is the work carried out by Enterprise VA from 'Loadbalancer.org'. As you might intuit from the name, Enterprise VA is a virtual appliance, and it is from a range of load balancers including hardware appliances and cloud solutions. We installed the 30-day trial which, should you decide to purchase, only requires a new licence key. We found installation to a VMware ESX easy and rapid and Hyper-V is also an option.

Next we made a quick configuration of the network environment and, if you choose, there is a wizard for this. As you would expect settings can be changed at any time, but we were keen to start balancing using the Web User Interface. Initially it offered three graphs reporting network bandwidth, system load and memory usage of ENTERPRISE VA. As new services are defined, other graphs are presented.

Main menu navigation is based on System Overview; Local Configuration; Cluster Configuration; Maintenance; View

Configuration; Reports, and Logs & Support. ENTERPRISE VA works to manage all incoming TCP and UDP traffic to a server farm or cluster over which you can assert balancing options to suit your needs.

Next we provisioned a pair of virtual MS Exchange 2013 servers and quickly had them in our sights. In this test configuration we could set up criteria for the health check process between the servers where the capability ranges from a simple ping, through to a handshake or a negotiation. Traffic management takes place using familiar options including Weighted Round Robin, Least Connection, etc.

With the 'Loadbalancer.org' Windows Agent installed on each server, factors like CPU status and memory can be added to the balancing equation. This Windows Agent is available as open source software and the next release will work with HAProxy, LVS and Ldirectord. We think this is important as there is no point forwarding traffic to a server with bandwidth capacity but limited hardware resources.

With everything configured we were able to drill down on the graphs and view historical data. There is no complicated reporting suite and we felt that the relevant information was readily available. With the setup complete, configuration changes were easy to make and control over the servers, including the ability to restart as well as adding or deleting servers.

It is easy to see that 'Loadbalancer.org' is more than its products, and we experienced some nice touches. For example when the free trial expires you can carry on using what has been configured - you just can't change it. Also licencing seems extremely fair as it is based on the number of connected services and not network bandwidth. If you should need to upgrade, this can be purchased by paying the difference between what you have and what you need, and again, updating the licence key.

The challenge to load balance TCP and UDP based traffic is growing and it can be quite complex, embracing traditional server services such as IIS, Exchange Terminal Services and Web Filtering, as well as the more recent SIP and Video Streaming services. Apparently one customer comfortably balances 10 Microsoft Exchange Client Access Servers with around 25,000 mailboxes.

'Loadbalancer.org' is a British company with a very clear focus and strong expertise. The simplicity of ENTERPRISE VA belies its ability and we think it represents great value, handling server load balancing extremely well and without any fuss. **NC**

Product: Enterprise VA
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