PRODUCTREVIEW

Loadbalancer Enterprise 6.7 from Loadbalancer.org
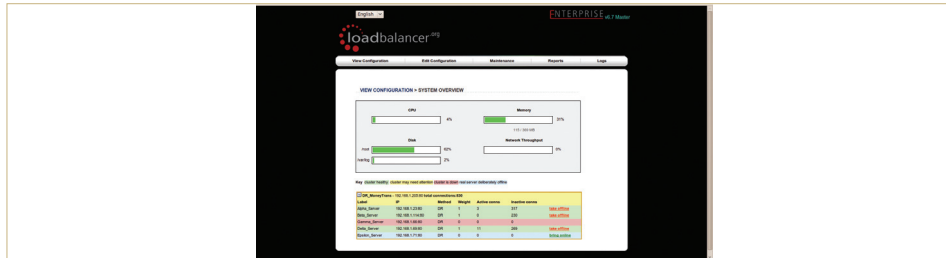
Distributing workload through pooled resource is an established technique to avoid unnecessarily overloading network resources. Application load-balancing specifically improves the users' access to chosen applications and services, and brings collateral benefits, including disaster recovery, high availability, hardware efficiency and improved performance.

Version 6.7 of the Loadbalancer.org product range comes in five forms. There are four appliance options, Standard Enterprise, R16, Eco (ultra low power consumption), MAX (ultra high performance), and a VM Ware software option. The Enterprise version reviewed here is unrestricted in the number of virtual and real servers it can balance, whereas the R16 is limited to four of each. Whatever the start point, upgrade is simple, and two devices can be configured as a high-availability Master/Slave pair, depending on your required resilience.

Loadbalancer 6.7 is impressively flexible and it seemed that all our expectations were supported. This is a grown up networking product, and highly skilled Network Managers and administrators will quickly be at home. However, its Linux operating system is simplified through a friendly HTML interface, making it widely accessible.

Deployment configuration is the first choice, and is a question of considering the pros and cons of Direct Routing (Layer 4) or Network Address Translation (Layer 7). In this version, RDP cookie-based Source Network Address Translation is supported at layer 7, offering a solution to the Persistence problem.

During this review, the HTML interface was used, but some will prefer to use an SSH connection. The simplicity of the interface belies the complexity that can, if desired, be addressed. The front page offers five options: View Configuration, Edit Configuration, Maintenance, Reports and Logs. With default settings and a wizard or two, a working system can be unleashed quite quickly, and for many, this will be a good start point. It must be said that the documentation is very comprehensive and will offer most users what they need. This is all backed up by round the clock support and product translation into five languages.

Digging deeper, the Edit Configuration tab allows you to re-run the set up wizard, select layer 4 or 7 operation, server options, and can even set up a fallback server with a static information page should the service be down.

The newly added cookie insertion means that Loadbalancer 6.7 can learn and create associations between a user, connection, and server; and with idle time parameters, ensure that sessions can easily be re-authenticated. Similarly, SSL termination allows SSL packets to be balanced in layer 7, with the consequential benefit of moving the cryptography duties to Loadbalancer 6.7. This new version also allows balancing to utilise VLANs and physical networks.

This product is very much at home when left to get on with its duties and because of this it will appeal to a wide range of applications, but management visibility is not over looked. As seems to be a theme with Loadbalancer products, it can be as simple, or as comprehensive as you wish. Based around easy to view reports and logs, you can view accumulated statistics of real and virtual services, current connections, traffic volumes and new to this version, graphical views. Some of the functionality is really designed for de-bugging, but most of it is solidly useful management information.

The recommendation from Loadbalancer.org is to operate at layer 4 and this offers a plug-and-go capability to all networks needing to balance server workloads. But this out of the box high performance simplicity does not inhibit the more experienced user, who can get into some seriously impressive tuning of this efficiency yielding service. There's more; the price point of this product does not reflect its ability, which, when compared with many competitors, translates into a low cost, high functionality offer. We think that anyone considering high performance, high availability load balancing should start with the free 30-day download, which if you decide to buy, just carries on balancing, as it is easily converted to the full version with a license key. NC

Supplier: Loadbalancer.org
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