University of Bath migrates to better value load balancing

When the cost of supporting its existing, aging load balancers began to escalate, the University of Bath conducted a thorough evaluation of new products from six vendors. It found that Loadbalancer.org could deliver all the functionality and capacity it needed, while offering much better value for money than its existing vendor.

> *"Loadbalancer.org's virtual appliances were half the anticipated cost of renewing the support contract for the university's legacy Kemp load balancers. They were also at least 30% less expensive over three years than the equivalent new Kemp product and other load balancers evaluated."*

Neil Francis,
Network Engineering Manager,
University of Bath

Challenge

- High cost of renewing the support contract for existing, end-of-life load balancers

Solution

- Loadbalancer.org Enterprise VA

Benefits

- 50% saving on the anticipated cost of renewing support contract for existing products
- 30% less expensive than other comparable load balancers
- Versatile health check functionality for improving server performance
- Easy access to skilled support engineers
- Customizable open source technology
- Inclusive Web Application Firewall (WAF) to enhance security

Challenge

The University of Bath relies on load balancing technology to help it ensure the high availability of a wide range of systems, including critical web services used by students to enroll and access their timetables. For more than five years, the university had been using load balancers from Kemp, but as these products aged, the annual support contract for them had begun to get prohibitively expensive.

"We could have just upgraded to the current Kemp model, which would have reduced the support cost," explains Neil Francis, Network Engineering Manager at the University of Bath. "However, we always like to do a full review of what else is available on the market, whenever technology expires or is due for a mandatory refresh. Our load balancing requirements had also changed over the preceding five years, so we decided to go back out to market and see what products were available to meet our requirements."

Solution

Over a period of several weeks, the university evaluated six products, from six vendors, in a process that involved vendor meetings, demonstrations, trials and in-house tests. The IT team was very clear about what functionality it needed, and this helped to steer the selection process. "Many of the products we evaluated had functionality we didn't need and busy-looking user interfaces, making them quite complicated to operate," says Francis. "Loadbalancer.org did just what we wanted and did it well."

The university selected Loadbalancer.org and installed one pair of virtual appliances in its production environment, with capacity to load balance around 20 services, and a further pair of virtual appliances in its test environment. As part of a phased plan, it initially migrated five services to the Loadbalancer.org platform, including Layer 4 and Layer 7 systems for authentication and logging. It is now working to migrate all remaining systems across, including mission critical HTTP web applications for student services and human resources.

Benefits

Loadbalancer.org has delivered all of the functionality and capacity that the University of Bath needed, at a reduced price. According to Francis, "Loadbalancer.org's virtual appliances were half the anticipated cost of renewing the support contract for the university's legacy Kemp load balancers. They were also at least 30% less expensive over three years than the equivalent new Kemp product and other load balancers evaluated."

Using the Loadbalancer.org virtual appliances, it is now much easier for the networking team to create and use standard and customized scripts for checking the health of its physical servers. Currently, it is just checking server availability, but it plans to also monitor traffic loads to better manage server performance. Francis observes, "Health checking is easier with Loadbalancer.org than with our previous Kemp products and helps us to improve the robustness and reliability of our services."

The networking team has had a very positive experience working with Loadbalancer.org's support team. "Often, with other vendors, you have to go through multiple layers of support before you reach someone with the right skills and knowledge who you can have a sensible conversation with," says Francis. "Loadbalancer.org gives us easy access to its expert engineering teams, straight away."

The networking team at the University of Bath likes the fact that Loadbalancer.org's products are based on open source technologies, rather than proprietary software. This means that IT technicians can understand how the products operate and customize the code, if they want to. "The fact that we can see how things work, gives us trust in the product," explains Francis.

The Loadbalancer.org virtual appliances include a Web Application Firewall (WAF), and the university plans to use this feature to strengthen its application security and help it manage SSL termination in particular. Following a number of high profiled cyber-attacks on educational institutions in the UK over recent years, IT security is a key concern, and the WAF will provide another piece of armor in the university's critical defenses.