

Don't get stuck in the networking jam – Dec 2007

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Recent research from analyst firm Quocirca has shown that about 42 per cent of European businesses now rely on web-enabled applications and these are often being accessed over the internet.

Not surprisingly, portals, which are inherently web-based, featured at the top of the list of applications that businesses have web-enabled. But businesses are also directly web-enabling certain key business applications, specifically to allow direct access to them from the outside.

These include customer relationship management, supply chain management and enterprise resource planning. These applications are the most widely accessed by external organisations, those in which business management take the most interest and those that cause the most concern should access become unavailable.

And herein lies the problem. Opening up business applications to suppliers, customers and trading partners is a great idea if businesses want to automate and speed up certain processes. But, if to do this they are relying on an overused public network, these benefits are at risk if the network becomes too slow or fails.

Businesses that rely on web-enabled applications are aware of this conundrum; they have high expectations of internet performance and availability, but real concerns about the internet being able to deliver. However, most are proactive in trying to improve and guarantee performance.

The first thing many businesses do is throw more hardware at the problem, which will make no difference if the network is failing. They are also likely to place limitations on what their employees can do on the internet - this will reduce traffic over the parts they own (such as

broadband connections in branches) and is likely to have a positive impact on productivity. But it will not do much to ensure web-enabled applications perform well over the internet.

To do this requires more subtle techniques. A minority have turned to hardware appliances from vendors such as Riverbed, Expand and Packeteer, which are designed to reduce, compress and accelerate traffic between branches and data centres. However, such products do little to help remote users on laptops or external users, unless there is also a PC-based software client for communicating with a data centre-based appliance. Some vendors are now starting to offer this capability.

Another way of guaranteeing a better and more reliable experience is to subscribe to a managed service, offered by vendors such as Akamai. Such services keep the internet connection between a user and the application under constant review and optimise the route and performance.

Appliances and managed services are not direct alternatives but are often complementary. In Quocirca's survey, about 25 per cent of respondents were using one or the other and of these about one-third were using both.

While the internet is becoming more essential for the delivery of inter-company business processes, ensuring optimum and consistent performance will become increasingly problematic as the internet's users compete for resources. Those businesses that achieve the most from web-enabling applications will be those who find the best ways of guaranteeing performance levels.

Quocirca's report Web-enabled applications and the internet is free for CRN readers to download at Quocirca's home page www.quocirca.com.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, Dell, T-Mobile, Vodafone, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at <http://www.quocirca.com>