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Veteran satellite provider unveils WAN optimization technology

Hughes Network Systems adds WAN optimization and application acceleration capabilities to managed services lineup

BY ANN BEDNARZ

WAN optimization and application acceleration technologies oftentimes require the installation of a dedicated appliance at remote office sites. While the benefits are very real, so too is the risk of appliance overload. That's one reason why some vendors are integrating more features into WAN appliances (such as security features, print and file server functions, IP address management capabilities, and more) to offset the proliferation of single-function appliances cluttering branch office environs.

For enterprises that need a performance boost but don't want to add more hardware to every remote site, Hughes Network Systems is offering an alternative. The Germantown, Md.-based service provider is building WAN optimization and application acceleration capabilities into its premises-based access routers so enterprise customers can speed performance on their broadband IP VPN networks without deploying another box (Compare Application Acceleration and WAN Traffic Optimization products).

The new HughesNet managed offerings are designed to improve network utilization and performance of TCP applications via techniques including caching, data reduction, compression and application prioritization. The new capabilities are integrated into Hughes' access routers.

"What we're introducing is software that's embedded in the access router and deals with optimization and acceleration," says Sampath Ramaswami, senior director of services development at Hughes. "We believe that approach can make it immediately applicable to the widest set of customers considering broadband VPN."

Hughes is adding the capabilities to its existing lineup of broadband network and managed services offerings, which span fixed terrestrial, wireless and satellite networks.

The services also can help avoid a bandwidth upgrade, Ramaswami says. "The question many enterprises face is whether a bandwidth increase is the right option for them," he says. "Oftentimes that is the answer, and as a network provider we can support that. But oftentimes it's not the answer."

The addition of acceleration and optimization features to Hughes' IP VPN services also provides an alternative to an MPLS network deployment, industry watchers say.

"Hughes is addressing a key market need by enabling enterprise customers to enjoy a truly differentiated managed service over a broadband IP VPN without incurring the cost and complexity of a full MPLS network deployment," said Brian Washburn, a research director at Current Analysis, in a statement.

Hughes' full portfolio of managed services includes high availability options that combine both a DSL and satellite connection at each enterprise site for load balancing and redundancy purposes. The vendor's history as a satellite network provider is important as it offers customers the option to combine multiple broadband access technologies — DSL, cable, T-1, satellite — as appropriate, Ramaswami says.

"For an enterprise with a large number of sites, the prevailing industry methodology has been to address any DSL or broadband dark spots with T1s, which is very expensive," he says. "Companies have wound up with their sites that are the most remote having the most expensive cost structure for network access."