Blue Coat CacheFlow Helps Regional Telco Improve Service and Save on Bandwidth

Caching helps North-Eastern Pennsylvania Telephone retain customers and improve customer satisfaction.

North-Eastern Pennsylvania Telephone (NEP) is a rural, local telecommunications company that has provided a full range of services to its customers for more than 110 years. With roughly 15,000 subscribers, the company offers voice telephony, cable TV, wireless services and data services, including dial-up, broadband DSL and wireless Internet access, in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The regional provider, based in Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, has a reputation for leading in the market with technology innovation. It is known for offering desirable smartphones with attractive services plans and the latest in digital TV.

NEP, like service providers big or small, is coping with the phenomenal growth in Internet usage. Customers use the voice and video capabilities of the Internet for business, but especially for recreation – streaming movies from YouTube or Netflix and frequenting social networking sites like Facebook. This rich Web 2.0 media consumes massive amounts of bandwidth, and meeting customers’ insatiable demands for multimedia content during periods of peak activity can be expensive for service providers.

Providing the experience its customers want presents particular challenges to NEP. As a rural service provider, it does not enjoy the same close proximity to Internet peering points, as do service providers located in metropolitan areas. For NEP, upstream Internet access is expensive and – before adding caching – it was insufficient to meet customers’ growing media consumption and online habits.

Optimize Network Performance

NEP looked to its managed service provider, Netegrity Consultants, to resolve these issues. Netegrity performed a proof-of-concept evaluation for NEP with Blue Coat’s CacheFlow appliance, which helps service providers manage dramatic increases in network traffic and subscriber growth. The CacheFlow appliance delivers scalable caching that enables service providers to save bandwidth on upstream links, thus saving money while caching content closer to users, which ultimately accelerates customers’ Web experiences.

“NEP immediately recognized the strong business value of Blue Coat’s CacheFlow appliances—bandwidth savings coupled with an improved user experience—and it appreciated the company’s long history in the caching and service provider market,” said Scott Brennan, Managing Member of Netegrity. “And they were pleased with the result.”

NEP saw bandwidth savings of 40 percent—and sometimes more. “NEP almost nearly doubled its client-side bandwidth by using caching,” Brennan said. “For every 100 requests to the Internet, 40 percent could be served locally from the cache.”

Using CacheFlow appliances allowed NEP to nearly cut in half its upstream bandwidth requirements, which has resulted in a savings of tens of thousands of dollars per month. Not only did NEP save money with the CacheFlow appliance, the company improved the customer experience. Users who had begun to complain about slow Web performance—especially when watching movies on the Internet—noticed significant improvements. NEP’s customer satisfaction shot up.

“NEP used caching to get a competitive edge,” Brennan said. “They saved money on bandwidth expenses, and they improved the user experience.”

The network performance improvements are also allowing NEP to offer premium, higher speed services to its customers. “Caching allows NEP to differentiate its service and gain another source of revenue,” said Brennan.
Adapting to the Internet

Blue Coat CacheFlow appliances adapt to enhance the effectiveness of Web caching as the Internet changes, including how YouTube and Netflix deliver video, which ultimately protects customers’ investments. Blue Coat’s CachePulse service automatically delivers automatic, network-based updates to CacheFlow appliances, which ensure that the appliance effectively caches content and consistently delivers high bandwidth savings.

During the evaluation of CacheFlow, NEP was able to benefit from CachePulse and get caching rule and instruction updates that contributed to the sustained bandwidth savings. Going forward, CachePulse will give NEP the confidence that it can keep up these savings, even as the Web changes.

For Brennan, the path is clear. “Companies have a choice,” he said. “They can either keep paying for bandwidth, dealing with the network they have and their frustrated customers or they can do something. CacheFlow radically contains costs and pumps up the user experience.”