The EP600 WAN Optimiser from DBAM Systems

Optimising existing underperforming WAN links is a far more cost-effective response than throwing extra bandwidth at them. However, many appliance-based solutions are aimed at big businesses and have price tags to match. UK based DBAM Systems has developed its own optimisation products and along with extreme value, its family of EP (exbander precision) appliances deliver an unbeatable range of features.

The EP600 on review is aimed at head office deployments with traffic throughputs of 2-16Mbps. For remote office links, DBAM offers its EP60 appliance which provides a swift installation routine as all you do is connect two network cables and the rest is handled automatically.

The EP600 functions as a transparent TCP proxy that intercepts and optimises all TCP traffic with a wide range of technologies including, WAFS (wide area file services), bandwidth management, protocol optimisation and compression. There's much more, as the appliances use sophisticated pattern matching techniques that keep a keen focus on performance.

DBAM stands out from the crowd as it offers advanced diagnostics, traffic analysis and fault finding. It can, for example, identify problems associated with DNS and packet fragmentation errors and not only alert administrators, but advise them on remedial actions. The EP600 also offers a very high level of traffic shaping capabilities where it can prioritise traffic based on parameters such as network ports, protocols, applications and URLs. During testing we could even monitor individual IM conversations and use the EP600 to replace unacceptable words or phrases.

For testing we used an EP600 as our head office appliance and an EP60 for the remote site. Management is via DBAM's Precision Start Java-based app and this opens with a tidy interface and a step-by-step installation guide. Deployment is remarkably simple as the EP600 automatically connects to the EP units at the remote offices, requiring no user intervention whatsoever.

The connection process is determined simply by the applications the remote office is accessing and where they are located, and so the appliances will automatically link up with each other. Profiles determine optimisation behaviour and are based on criteria such as specific applications and protocols. Rather than deploy profiles to selected remote appliances, their use is determined purely by what the remote office is running.

To test performance we used the lab's resident Network Nightmare WAN simulator and configured it for a 2Mbps E1 WAN link with 40ms latency. With the simulator positioned between the appliances, we added a Windows Server 2003 R2 system on one side configured with file, IIS and FTP services plus Kerio MailServer to provide mail services. On the other side we connected another Windows server system to act as a client and used a 4.8MB PowerPoint presentation to test a variety of scenarios.

With optimisation disabled, copying the file from the server took 60 seconds and with the EP600 in the mix and the file cached, the same task took less than a second. Remotely opening the file at the client using PowerPoint took 63 seconds, but with the file cached this was reduced to 9 seconds. Mailing the test file from the client as an attachment with no optimisation took 192 seconds and with optimisation activated, this was reduced to only 2 seconds. FTP and HTTP downloads of the test file took 37 and 22 seconds respectively, but with optimisation functioning, these both fell to around 1 second.

The EP600 clearly delivers in the performance stakes and we found deployment a remarkably simple process. However, the sheer level of features impressed us the most as there's no other optimisation solution on the market that comes close to DBAM at this impressive price point. NC

Product: EP600
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Tel: 01924 887088
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Price: EP600 for 2 Mb/sec links - £6,139 excluding VAT