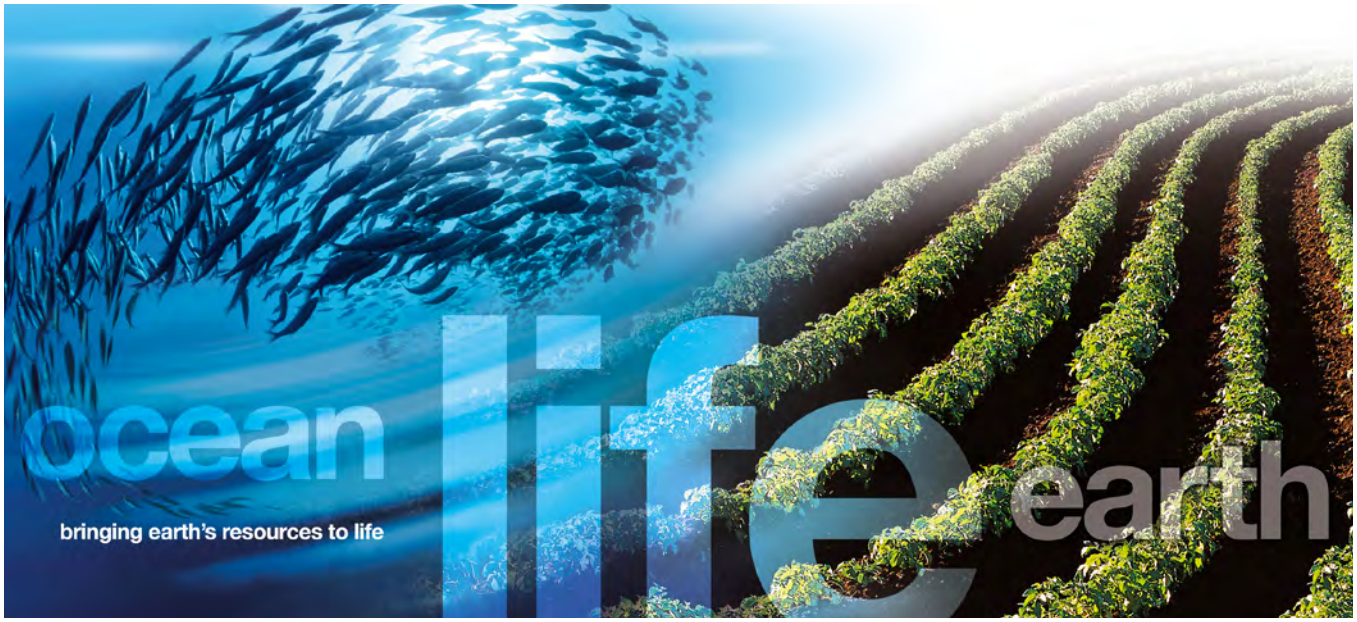
Simplot Australia Keeps Food Brands Moving With Cisco ACE

Customer Case Study



Major food and agricultural firm ensures high availability for critical applications with Cisco load balancing technology.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: Simplot Australia Pty. Ltd.

Industry: Food and Agriculture

Location: Australia

Challenge

- Growing application traffic to centralised data centre
- Maintain application response times

Solution

Cisco® Application Control Engine (ACE)

Results

- Improved application high availability
- Faster application deployment
- Greater scalability

Business Challenge

Founded in 1995, Simplot Australia is a wholly owned subsidiary of the J.R. Simplot Company, a privately held food and agribusiness corporation based in Idaho, US. The J.R. Simplot Company is now a multinational food and agri-business with annual sales of more than $US 3 billion, and owns some of Australia's favourite food brand businesses including Birds Eye, Leggo's and John West.

In 2010, Simplot Australia deployed the Oracle JD Edwards enterprise resource planning (ERP) application to improve companywide efficiency, giving more than 2,300 of its user's access to timely, accurate supply chain and operational information. It also moved to a shared services environment for administrative systems, including human resources and payroll.

With this move, users from different office around the country were now accessing the ERP application from a single data centre in Melbourne, resulting in high traffic volumes at the ERP server farm. With 25 sites in Australia alone, and sites in Beijing, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur and Auckland depending on the continuous availability of the ERP application, the company had to ensure that application response would not be affected in any way. For example, server downtime would have a direct impact on the company's ability to deliver its food products to supermarkets on time. "We run on a tight delivery schedule, and if the system is unresponsive, our trucks may miss their delivery times, since they can't process their dispatch waybills. Late deliveries can be rejected by the supermarkets, resulting in lost revenue and credibility," said Richard Bradfield, Communications Engineer, Simplot Australia Pty Ltd.

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Richard Bradfield, Communications Engineer, Simplot Australia Pty Ltd.

Solution

What the company needed was a solution that would ensure high system availability. In searching for a solution, Simplot Australia turned to Cisco. "We have been using Cisco products for the last 20 years. Cisco technology powers our IP telephony, our switches and router, and we also use Cisco wide-area application acceleration. We are a Cisco shop as far as network infrastructure is concerned," remarked Richard.

The company decided to implement Cisco's application load balancing technology in the form of the Cisco Application Control Engine (ACE). Cisco ACE delivers intelligent load-balancing and content-switching technologies integrated with acceleration and security capabilities. For Simplot Australia, the Cisco ACE appliance would ensure that their JD Edwards application would not suffer any downtime. Application acceleration and its ability to offload server performance would also improve the application responsiveness for users.

Cisco ACE also features a virtualised architecture and role-based administration, helping the company provision and deliver multiple applications in a single box. Since each application runs within its own "virtual context", any configuration changes to one application would not impact the other.

"The big selling point for Cisco – apart from the technology itself - was their strong customer support. The Cisco support team in Melbourne has always been there to give us the information we need to make a decision, or bring in the right people to help," he added.

In 2010, Simplot Australia deployed the Cisco ACE appliance in its Cisco core switches to load-balance incoming inventory control traffic to the least-busy servers. Initial applications handled by Cisco ACE included JD Edwards, as well as several Microsoft-based applications. In terms of deploying the Cisco ACE appliances, Richard says the set up process was intuitive and presented no issues. "Installing the ACE appliance module was as quick and easy. Since it's a fully hardware and software integrated piece of equipment, we just plugged the ACE appliance into our network, made minimal configuration changes, and we were up and running," says Richard.

Results

Choosing the Cisco ACE simplified integration and support by keeping all support under the Cisco umbrella. The appliance form factor makes the Cisco ACE easily deployed into the data centre, and simplifies support by the Cisco Technical Assistance Centre (TAC) with access to Cisco expertise and an escalation path if necessary. "The support is important, but we've not had to use it to date. The Cisco ACE is such a stable product, we've had zero issues with the load balancing in over two years. We've put more and more applications into the box, and it's handled it without any drama," says Richard.

The application acceleration capabilities of Cisco ACE also improved the user experience. "Cisco ACE uses a range of acceleration capabilities to improve application response time, reduce bandwidth volume, and improve the efficiency of protocols.

"In our business, we need to be running 24/7. That means that you never get time for maintenance. But with Cisco ACE, I can take things offline for servicing, and nobody will notice the difference"

Richard Bradfield, Communications Engineer, Simplot Australia Pty Ltd.

The Cisco ACE has also provided the company with the following benefits:

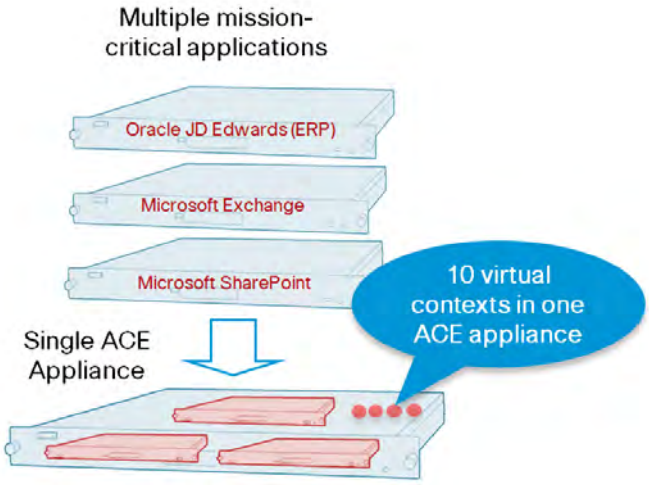
Always available applications

The automatic failover capabilities provided by Cisco ACE means that if a single server hosting a critical application was to fail, the session could continue without impacting the user. Today, Cisco ACE is keeping a range of critical applications up and running, including Microsoft Exchange, SharePoint, DNS servers, as well as LDAP for authentication. For Simplot Australia, application uptime was crucial because of their global network of sites accessing the applications. "Because of the time differences between our offices in China and Australia and in the US, we need things to be running round the clock, every day. For our processes to run smoothly, we have to ensure that if, in the event that we encounter a problem, or if a server goes offline, it doesn't affect the business," said Richard.

"In our business, we need to be running 24/7. That means that you never get time for maintenance. But with Cisco ACE, I can take things offline for servicing, and nobody will notice the difference," said Richard.

Faster application deployment

Rolling out a new application or adding application support for another department simply requires the addition of a new virtual context within the physical Cisco ACE appliance, rather than deployment of an additional hardware platform. "This architecture has reduced our TCO by simplifying application provisioning and ongoing management for IT teams, thus enabling multiple our departments or stakeholders to independently manage appropriate, role-assigned tasks," added Richard.



Above: Cisco ACE virtual contexts allows load balancing for multiple applications

Room for expansion

The Cisco ACE allows Simplot Australia to scale from 0.5Gbps to 1Gbps to 4Gbps throughput on a single Cisco ACE appliance using only a software license upgrade. The high throughput means that more and more applications can be funnelled through the Cisco ACE easily. "We are currently running 10 virtual contexts, allocated by applications and departments. The Cisco ACE appliance has surpassed our expectations for scalability and throughput and we're looking to add many more applications in the near future."

PRODUCT LIST

Data Center

- Cisco Catalyst Switches
- Cisco ACE (Application Control Engine) Appliances
- Cisco WAAS (Wide Area Applications Services)
- Cisco Wireless AP/Wireless LAN Controller
- Cisco Routers
- Cisco Unified Communications

Next Steps

As for the future, Simplot Australia's plans for growth remain on course. With the ACE module in place, there isn't a need to rethink or replace its existing infrastructure it has globally. "The Cisco ACE solution's industry-leading scalability will help reinforce our business continuity as our installations expand," said Richard.

The company also hopes to use Cisco ACE appliances to enable load balancing between global data centres to further improve service availability. "In the next couple of years, our separate disaster recovery site (30km away from the main data centre) will gradually be brought online as an active-active data centre, which means that we'll be bringing on more Cisco ACE appliances very soon," he added.

For More Information

For more information on Simplot Australia, visit www.simplot.com.au
For more information on Cisco® ACE Application Control Engine, visit http://www.cisco.com/go/ace

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San Jose, CA

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