

Players of the world's largest multiplayer online game get improved customer service and support with Cisco Data Center technology



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
CUSTOMER NAME · CCP
LOCATION · Reykjavik, Iceland
INDUSTRY · Media
COMPANY SIZE · 350 employees
BUSINESS CHALLENGE · Manage increasing subscriber numbers and demand on website applications whilst maintaining customer service levels and controlling cost · Ensure services supporting the flagship EVE Online gaming product run at maximum efficiency · Make business application control and maintenance faster
NETWORK SOLUTION · Cisco® Data Center Network Architecture · Cisco Application Control Engine (ACE) Module
BUSINESS VALUE · Helps to improve and increase high quality customer service and support · Helps to maintain CCP's reputation for fast, efficient and reliable web services · Maximizes availability of critical business applications · Reduces number and time critical business applications need to be offline for maintenance and repair

Cisco Application Control Engine Module ensures CCP delivers maximum availability for web applications and services that support EVE Online.

Business Challenge

In 2003, CCP, an electronic games developer in Iceland, launched what was to become the world's largest massively multiplayer online game (MMOG). While most similar multiplayer games achieve around 1,000 concurrent players, EVE Online has dwarfed them with over 42,000 users playing the game at the same time. It has the capacity to go up to a staggering 100,000 concurrent users. The game itself is also impressive, offering players high quality graphics depicting a 3D galaxy of 5,000 different solar systems and the choice of four different playable races. Players have a huge range of roles, situations and equipment to select as well as some innovative features such as designing what their characters look like and being able to communicate within the game with other players via channels such as email, chat, instant messaging and even real-time voice.

CCP, which is headquartered in Reykjavik with offices in the US, UK and China, has 230,000 subscribers from around the world and the number continues to grow monthly.

CCP's business relies almost entirely on its online capability – not just the availability and resilience of its flagship product EVE, but also the websites that enable the company to bring on more subscribers, support those subscribers and provide them with the ability to share and communicate information with one another.

The challenge facing CCP was to ensure that EVE-Online.com and other supporting websites and services were available to subscribers 24/7 without problems or a drop in performance as subscriber numbers and demand increased.

Network Solution

CCP uses a hosted data center in London where EVE runs on around 100 servers. Also, located in London are an additional 18 servers that the company uses to manage all the ancillary services and functions related to the company and in particular EVE. This includes the main EVE website offering



registration services, background information on EVE, access to related music and video and EVE merchandising.

CCP was already using Cisco foundation technologies for its local area networking in Iceland, the US and China when the company turned to Cisco for a solution to help improve the way it manages and maintains its web applications located in its hosted data center.

Jon-Carlos Mayes, IT director at CCP, says, "We were already familiar with Cisco and we wanted to realize the high quality, ease of use and flexibility that Cisco brings into managing our data center networking capability. Also, because Cisco is such a strong and pervasive brand, getting the knowledge and skills you need to support critical network and data center applications is easy."

CCP is developing a Cisco® Data Center Network Architecture by deploying Cisco switching technology in its London data center which hosts the Cisco Application Control Engine Module (ACE). The Cisco ACE is used to improve the way its website applications are managed and shared across CCP's 18 servers. Using virtualization technologies to ensure that these server resources are used as efficiently as possible, the Cisco ACE allows applications to be spread across several servers instead of having to dedicate hardware to specific applications or websites. Not only does this mean better utilisation of server resources, leading to increases in speed and productivity as well as cost savings through reduced need for additional servers, but it also brings benefits in terms of regular and emergency maintenance.

Prior to deploying the Cisco ACE technology, if one of the company's web applications needed changing or there was a problem, the whole website related to that application would have to be shut down while the necessary upgrades or repairs were carried out. Often it is possible to carry out application maintenance during out of hours periods, but online gamers use EVE and its associated web services all hours of the day and night making it essential for CCP to keep application downtime to a minimum.

Now, Cisco ACE has enabled CCP to provide virtual partitioning of its web applications across several servers which means that individual parts or applications can be effectively 'ring-fenced'. When changes or fixes need to be carried out, only the specific area needs to be taken down, virtually eliminating the impact of other applications.

"One of the most critical business issues for us is the stability and reliability of our IT infrastructure. The web is the face of CCP. It is where we sell our products, manage billing and support services for our subscribers. Any downtime or performance shortfall impacts critical business functions like bringing on new subscribers and offering existing ones the best levels of service."

Jon-Carlos Mayes, IT Director, CCP

PRODUCT LIST

Routing and Switching

- Cisco Catalyst 6500 Series Switches
- Cisco Catalyst 3560 Series Switches
- Cisco Catalyst 2960 Series Switches
- Cisco 2811 Integrated Services Router
- Cisco Aironet 1310 AG Series

Security and VPN

- Cisco PIX Firewall Software
- Cisco Secure Access Control Server Solution Engine
- Cisco Network Analysis Module Software

Another key consideration for CCP deciding to use the Cisco technology was having a scalable solution that would handle the immense traffic loads and huge peak and trough fluctuation that can be generated by the gaming community. Once again the virtualized approach helps manage these fluctuating loads without the need to invest in massive amounts of redundant server capacity.

The Cisco approach to virtualization, using the power of the network to abstract computing (server) and storage resources as well as applications, provides a holistic view of overall performance. The network acts as the perfect intermediary allowing applications to

perform as efficiently as possible by connecting them to the devices and resources they need as and when they are needed.

Business Results

Mayes says, "One of the most critical business issues for us is the stability and reliability of our IT infrastructure. The web is the face of CCP. It is where we sell our products, manage billing and support services for our subscribers. Any downtime or performance shortfall impacts critical business functions like bringing on new subscribers and offering existing ones the best levels of service."

Through the success and effectiveness of the Cisco ACE in helping CCP manage its support and information web services, the company is now considering using the Cisco data center technology to help improve performance, reliability and management for the 100 servers that wholly support the EVE Online virtual world.



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