InfoWorld

Product review: WARP your WAN for performance and reliability

FatPipe Networks' easy and flexible router clustering appliance makes the most of multiple WAN connections

By Phillip J. Windley, August 28, 2008

I've had a Comcast cable Internet connection for years. Last year I got a shiny new fiber connection from Mstar. But rather than uninstall the cable connection, I asked FatPipe Networks if they'd be willing to let me perform an extended test of the company's flagship route clustering product, WARP.

WARP is a 4U, rack-mountable network appliance that allows up to three WAN connections to be aggregated without the need for complicated BGP (Border Gateway Protocol) routing configurations. The unit provides traffic load balancing over these connections, allowing both inbound and outbound traffic to take advantage of them. Being able to handle connections of varying speeds from different providers makes WARP a great choice for businesses seeking to add extra bandwidth and increase the reliability of their connectivity.

Quick setup

Within an hour of cracking the shipping box, I had both of my WAN connections providing bandwidth to the house. WARP is configured using a Java applet-based management console from the device's LAN port. I'm always glad when I don't have to drag out the serial cables to configure a piece of networking gear.
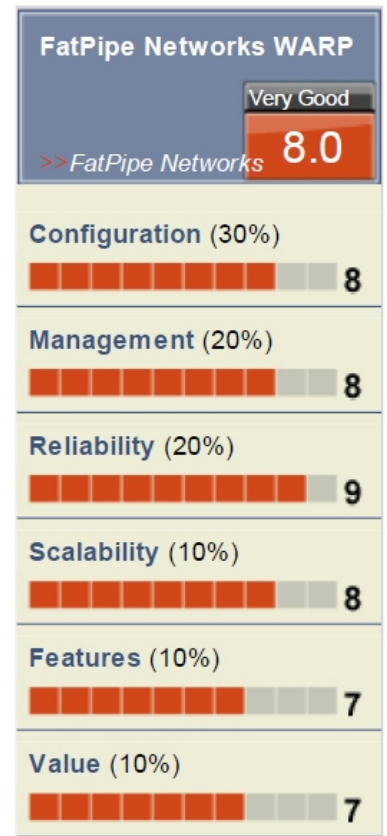
Configuring the device is straightforward. Beyond the usual administrative functions such as administering users, configuration backup, and system setup, WARP offers a host of basic and advanced configuration options.

Among the basic options, you can choose from three different load-balancing algorithms: round robin, response time, and fastest route. Round robin simply rotates sending packets down each WAN. Response time allows traffic to be spread unequally over WAN connections so that faster connections serve more requests. Fastest route uses a particular WAN connection for each destination after determining which WAN has the fastest route.

Options in, options out

WARP also supports several advanced configuration options, including policy-based routing, static routes, and a DNS feature called SmartDNS that provides redundancy and load balancing to internal servers. SmartDNS allows internal hosts to have different IP addresses for each WAN connection and automatically maps them to the right internal addresses.

Using the advanced options requires some knowledge of networking concepts. For

FatPipe Networks WARP

Very Good
8.0

>>*FatPipe Networks*

Configuration (30%) — 8

Management (20%) — 8

Reliability (20%) — 9

Scalability (10%) — 8

Features (10%) — 7

Value (10%) — 7

Cost
Starts at $8,700; $14,500 for 50Mbps unit (as tested). QoS, Site Load Balancing, and VPN modules available at additional cost.

Bottom Line
FatPipe's WARP appliance is a cost-effective way to aggregate two or three WAN connections for increased bandwidth and reliability. Though a bit pricey, with features such as QoS available at additional cost, the system is dead simple to configure and provides DNS load balancing and policy-based routing capabilities out of the box. Best of all, it works without a hiccup.

Continuation next page...

InfoWorld

Product review: WARP your WAN for performance and reliability

FatPipe Networks' easy and flexible router clustering appliance makes the most of multiple WAN connections

...Continuation from previous page

connection issues and watching where traffic was going. I also appreciated being able to monitor traffic graphically in real time for visual confirmation that the policies I created were having the desired effect.

Easy, not cheap

There were a few features I didn't have a chance to test. The unit can be ganged with other WARP devices to provide fail-over protection, and it supports SNMPv2 for device monitoring and logging. The WARP device can be configured to use VPN tunnels with any IPSec VPN peer.

I'm impressed with the reliability of the device. I've been using WARP for more than six months with nary a hiccup. With a list price of $14,500 for the 50Mbps device, the WARP isn't inexpensive, and if you want QoS, site load balancing, or VPN capabilities, the cost is higher still. But if you need the reliability and bandwidth capacity of multiple WAN connections, it's a great value compared to buying BGP-capable routers and hiring the expertise to set them up

Phillip J. Windley is contributing editor of the InfoWorld Test Center.