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NEWSLETTER

Specialists in high-speed and rugged access solutions

June 2011

Welcome

Welcome to the Case Communications June 2011 Newsletter.
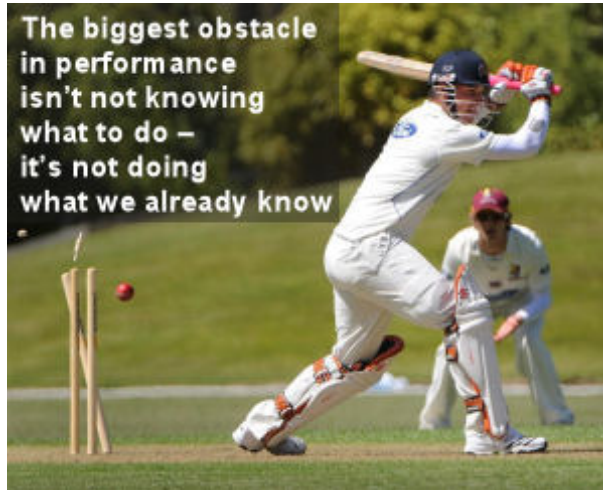
The biggest obstacle in performance isn't not knowing what to do — it's not doing what we already know

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Case Communications field trial the new Mark II rugged ADSL router

Case Communications have begun trials of their Mark II 'Highway' rugged router. The new router, which has not been given a model number yet, is fan-less, operates from -40c to +75C, and is capable of running ADSL 2+ Annex M, as well as over fibre, and has 3G back up for mission critical applications.

The router is equipped with 4 x Ethernet ports and one SFP port, and an RS 232/422/485 port, to allow for support of legacy systems and RTUs, and controllers.

The unit also makes use of IP Security and is browser-driven with advanced configuration via a CLI (Command Line Interface). The router has SNMP and will have a module developed for the CaseView Network Management system allowing it to be fully controlled, configured and managed by CaseView or other SNMP systems.

Case Communications marketing manager David King, says "Case Communications have been working on this new router for a considerable time, and have had to overcome several technical challenges. When it comes to product testing, we are very cautious and test our products for several months in as many different environments as possible. The Mark II Highway rugged router has already been testing for some time, and we expect to see the router officially launched in September of this year."

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Cisco boss retrenches, slashes growth forecast

Cisco's John Chambers has ditched the company's annual growth forecast of 12 to 17 per cent and pledged to take out $1bn in costs during fiscal 2012 after a torrid third quarter that saw the networking giant take a sledgehammer to its troubled consumer business.

Speaking with his customary candour, Chambers insisted Cisco was a "strong company in a healthy market" but conceded there were problematic areas and said he would take action to address these.

Cisco has already begun this process, announcing a streamlining of its business last week, but on Wednesday's analyst conference call Chambers gave his strongest hint yet that Cisco is looking to sell or shut down underperforming units.

As a result, said Chambers, Q4 will continue to show weakness "while we do the hard work behind the scenes to be able to execute these changes".

This is likely to involve further redundancies throughout the business, which will mostly be achieved through an early retirement programme, although Cisco did not put a figure on how many it would look to cut.

Richard Holway of analyst firm TechMarketView said that Cisco had become a victim of misplaced market focus and execution.

"The networking market is doing okay right now and, indeed, is one of the beneficiaries of the move to cloud. Competitors like Juniper Networks are doing fine," he said.

Despite Cisco's troubles, Q3 net sales of $10.9bn (£6.69bn) still beat expectations, growing 4.8 per cent on the year-ago quarter, although net income was down 17.6 per cent to $1.8bn.

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Fujitsu threatened with strike action

Sixty-five Unite members employed by IT services provider Fujitsu at its Crewe office are to walk out in protest at the treatment of their trade union rep, who they claim is being singled out for redundancy.

According to Unite, Alan Jenney, who has worked at Fujitsu for 17 years, is being unfairly treated by being put at risk of redundancy when Fujitsu has responded to job losses elsewhere through redeploying staff.

It claims Jenney's job is only at risk due to his union activities. Jenney was put on notice of redundancy at the end of March, and could be dismissed from 10 July.

"It is disappointing that such a major company is behaving this way towards its own employee who simple wants to be treated fairly and not singled out after 17 years of service for redundancy," said Unite national officer for IT and communications Kevin O'Gallagher.

"Going on strike is a last resort [but] as you would expect Unite is 100 per cent behind its members at Fujitsu," he added.

The industrial action, which was narrowly passed by Unite members with 52 per cent in favour, will include one day of strike action on 30 June, and continued work-to-rule and a policy of non-cooperation to start the same day.

Fujitsu does not discuss situations relating to specific employees in such circumstances.
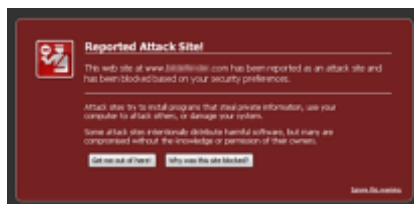
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Web site attacks becoming more common

Recent high-profile Web security breaches have caused organisations in both the private and public sectors to take a deeper look into the security measures they have in place as well as to question why there is such a recent concentration of attacks.

It is believed that there are a few trends underlying the recent increase in attacks:

- The first is the prevalence of hacking tools and 'how-to-guides' now available online about how to launch attacks. Whereas attacks used to be perpetrated by sophisticated hackers, now almost anyone can launch attack using these resources and automated tools. Just Google 'how to hack [system]', 'hacking tools' and you will find a plethora of tools and tips on how to accomplish these objectives.

- The second trend is economics. Traditional tools like anti-spam filters are increasingly ineffective as protection against money making-scams and use of these threats within organisations has increased. On the other hand, there is a thriving black market for stolen credit cards, emails, identities, zombie computers, etc. so data breaches are extremely profitable for hackers, and as a result, they are turning more attention to profitable endeavours like hacking Web sites.

- The final trend is an increase in web attacks for strategic purposes. Many of the most recent attacks, like the ones on defence contractors RSA/EMC, and Gmail, are extremely sophisticated and seem to have a strategic purpose or sponsorship to them.

Unfortunately, many of these attacks are happening because the right security measures are not in place at many organisations. This is not because there are not very effective solutions available, but instead there is a general lack of awareness and education about how these solutions can protect against such attacks. In many cases, a breach itself serves as the defining lesson for why Web application security tools - such as a WAF (Web Application Firewall) should be in place. In addition, the need for security layers within any organisation's infrastructure is also very important.

Overall, organisations need to know of the importance of having the right technology at each layer to protect their resources and the recent attacks can serve to reinforce this need:

- Protect your email infrastructure with an email filtering solution or service

- Secure your Web sites and Web applications with a WAF

- Reinforce your network perimeter with a next generation firewall

- Strengthen your network against malware, drive-by-downloads and other threats with a Web filtering device or service

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Travelodge targeted

Budget hotel chain Travelodge has become the latest well known firm to have to hold its hands up to a data breach after it revealed some customers had become victims of a spam attack.

In an email sent to customers from its chief executive Guy Parsons, the hotelier revealed limited details of the attack trying to calm users by promising that no financial information or customer data had been compromised.

"All financial data (including credit card information) is compliant with current best practice standards and is audited to PCI (Payment Card Industry) requirements," Pearson wrote.

The firm is holding an investigation into the issue but has warned people to be on the look out for spam emails that tell the user they are being offered a job that could provide them with a decent income for just a few hours work a week.

"A small number of you may have received a spam email via the email address you have registered with us," the email warned and Pearson told customers to delete the email and not to reply to the scam.

Travelodge joins a growing list of retailers and house hold names that have been hit by data breaches just this year with Sony, Play.com and RSA just a few of those that have had to send similar emails to customers.

The security channel has understandably been put on alert to help customers overcome data breaches and to protect users that could potentially fall victim to the problems.

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Public sector looking to contractors to fill IT job gaps

The drive for efficiency has seen a growth in IT vacancies in the public sector, and public bodies are turning to contractors to fill the gaps left by initial deep cuts.

Despite repeated headlines highlighting public sector spending restrictions and job cuts, in April the IT sector saw growth in job vacancies, according to Computer People's latest monthly employment research, IT Monitor. IT permanent hiring surged nine per cent in April as budgets for the new financial year became available. After cutting too deep initially, many departments took this opportunity to take on new permanent staff to restore vital capabilities. One month later, the trend has shifted and now contractor positions are in demand as vacancies rose nine per cent over the past month.

This trend can be explained by two phenomena:

Strategic decisions driven by government efficiencies

As the realities of the spending review continue to hit home, and many major projects are being cancelled or postponed, the public sector is more wary than ever of raising fixed costs through permanent staff. So with the most critical roles now filled, public sector hirers are now choosing contractors. Despite their higher daily costs, contractors are popular as a more flexible resource that can be used to deliver specific priority projects and then leave.

Changing balance between supply and demand

For the first time since early 2009, the IT sector is seeing a war for talent and a swing towards a candidate-led market. As demand for candidates increases, the best are able to cherry-pick the opportunities available. Counter offers for the best candidates are rising, and public sector hiring managers are increasingly struggling to fill permanent roles due to scarcity of resource – a situation exacerbated by the recent job cuts which have made candidates uncertain about entering the sector. Even where managers want to take on permanent staff, they are struggling to fill the positions on offer and we are seeing around half of permanent jobs turn to contractor opportunities after six to eight weeks of advertisement.

The roles that are most in demand indicate that public sector organisations are focusing on improving efficiency through IT. This is creating a salary premium and better opportunities for developers who can optimise day-to-day processes over the short term, and for project managers and architects who can plan and drive longer-term efficiencies. The public sector is following the path already being walked in the private sector, as organisations seek to better integrate IT with their overall strategy. Demand for real time management information is increasing – leading to an 11 per cent rise in business intelligence salaries compared to last year for those professionals adept at computer-based techniques for data analysis.

The recent growth in public sector recruitment reflects a wider trend across the whole IT industry. Where IT had previously been viewed as a back-office function and an easy target for cuts as the pressure for efficiency savings grew, it is now seen as a business-critical function. Given the right investment, strong IT services can drive organisational efficiency and are increasingly treated as an asset rather than an expense.

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