Steel Service Center Secures Reliable Remote Access with Virtual Appliance

Scalable Solution Provides Flexible Network Access to Critical Applications and Business Continuity on a Virtualization Platform

Having access to information and business-critical applications is crucial when communicating with customers, partners and prospects. At Infra-Metals, network administrators joined the virtualization movement and deployed a virtual remote access solution to provide secure and reliable remote access while streamlining network operations, consolidating servers and supporting green IT initiatives.

The Infra-Metals Story

Founded in 1990 and headquartered in Langhorne, Pa., Infra-Metals is a leading distributor of structural steel products. The company has strategic locations along the east coast of the U.S. including one of the largest structural steel service centers in the Eastern U.S. A subsidiary of Reliance Steel & Aluminum, Infra-Metals employs approximately 500 workers in facilities extending from Connecticut to Florida and into the Caribbean.

Infra-Metals' outside sales professionals and management team members travel to various work sites and require secure access to business applications when they are on the road and away from the office. For more than a decade the company has relied on AEP Netilla, a hardware-based platform for secure application delivery from Somerset, N.J.-based AEP Networks, a leader in secure communications and networking. Now, like other organizations, they are transitioning from a physical to virtual infrastructure, including an upgrade to the virtual edition of Netilla (Netilla VE). In addition to experiencing the benefits of virtualization, Infra-Metals is able to provide reliable application access and secure communication to mobile or remote employees quickly and easily from any location with an Internet connection.

Access Applications, Anywhere at Anytime

Coordinating sales activities, providing pricing and assessing inventories are all part of the job for Infra-Metals sales and management team. Even though the majority of users don't require remote access, those that do expect it to be reliable when accessing company resources and information during interactions with suppliers, prospects and customers. Netilla proved to be a dependable solution for meeting communication goals, but an initiative to streamline network operations and migrate to a virtual infrastructure prompted the company to look at replacing their physical device with a virtual appliance.

"Virtualization is a big movement in the industry right now and would allow us to consolidate technology, improve operations, save costs and achieve business flexibility," said Nick Lazaridis, IT manager of the Southern Region for Infra-Metals. "In making that transition from physical to virtual machine conversion we virtualized the majority of our servers – Netilla being one of them. We have had Netilla in our environment for a long time – originally renting the platform – and it has proven to be a perfect solution in meeting our remote access needs and enabling our users to access all their applications on the terminal server from anywhere they are able to gain Internet access."

""We are running our ERP system, Microsoft Office, Outlook Web Access, a telnet application and our intranet on Netilla VE. In addition to reliable performance, the solution also gives us redundancy …"

Nick Lazaridis, IT Manager of Southern Region, Infra-Metals

Virtual Environment Delivers Fail Safe

Infra-Metals still has a Netilla hardware platform in place and is running Netilla VE concurrently during the migration process. Netilla VE is a virtual application access gateway that enables secure Web browser access to a broad range of business applications. Remote users can quickly and securely reach the varied resources found in today's IT environment, including Microsoft Outlook, Windows Remote Desktop Services and server-based applications, as well as client/server applications over an SSL tunnel. At Infra-Metals, one Netilla virtual appliance is running over two Dell PowerEdge servers and sharing hardware with 15 other virtual servers.

"We are running our ERP system, Microsoft Office, Outlook Web Access, a telnet application and our intranet on Netilla VE," said Lazaridis. "In addition to reliable performance, the solution also gives us redundancy, which is something we didn't have with a physical appliance."

As with any physical appliance, should a device go down, it stays that way until it can be repaired or replaced. With a virtual appliance, if something happens to one of the virtual machine hosts then all the guest machines running on it will move over to another host without any user intervention.

“There are several advantages to virtual deployment,” added Jason Schroeder, senior solutions consultant with Net Direct Systems, an AEP Platinum Service Partner. “You don’t have the rack space, power and cooling issues you have with physical machines and you have a full back up of the appliance so recovery becomes quicker and easier. It also provides capacity for growth without having to swap out hardware. We recommend Netilla VE based on the price of its feature set and its performance. You get a lot of features that are not available on other remote access appliances.”

What sets Netilla VE apart from other virtual private network technology is the device’s quick set up and ease of configuration allowing for faster deployment. It also offers more flexible remote access options than competing products.

“If our authorized users can get to an Internet connection, they are able to connect to Netilla and access their applications,” said Lazaridis. “For other organizations that require remote access, I’d strongly recommend they take a good look at Netilla VE.

It’s a great platform and you get all the redundancy you’d get with any virtualized server in a virtualized environment. It meets our business needs by delivering secure networking and remote access and our users love it. They can launch their applications as they would if they were in the office. We plan on staying with AEP Networks and Netilla because there’s nothing else on the market that competes with its performance.”

Why AEP Netilla VE?

“AEP Networks’ Netilla VE offers flexibility for the different types of remote access our users require along with the benefits of being able to run it virtually, such as consolidation of servers, business continuity and supporting green IT. As we continue to develop applications for our sales and management team we’ll publish them to Netilla to give our authorized users reliable, secure remote access when they’re in the road or in the office.”

About AEP Networks

AEP Networks offers secure communications, networking and application access for government, enterprise and carriers. We work with systems integrators, managed service providers and the distribution channel to deliver integrated solutions incorporating our leading edge products:

- Enhanced-grade secure voice and multi-service data platforms (based on the vadOS operating system) that support a wide range of communications protocols and network topologies
- High assurance networking via IPsec-based VPN encryptors for site-to-site security and remote access
- Hardware Security Modules (HSMs) for cryptographic key management and storage
- Secure remote access to networks and applications – including virtual environments – via application-layer security gateways and SSL VPNs.

Headquartered in Somerset, New Jersey, AEP Networks has key offices in the United Kingdom (Hemel Hempstead & Ascot), Malaysia and Australia.

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