

Network Computing

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LoadMaster 1500 from Kemp Technologies

Representing the entry-point of Kemp Technologies web server load balancing appliances, the LoadMaster 1500 bucks the trend by offering a remarkable range of features, at a very tempting price. Traditionally, these types of devices cost a king's ransom but the price tag for this appliance is incredibly low. That said Kemp has made few sacrifices, as the 1500 delivers the full gamut of high-performance server load balancing, Layer 7 content switching and SSL acceleration.

The appliance sports a modest 800MHz VIA Eden C3 processor that is teamed up with 512MB of SDRAM memory; however this partnership delivers enough horsepower to handle SSL acceleration for up to 100 TPS (transactions per second) and supports 256 virtual and 1,000 physical servers.

The appliance employs the concept of virtual servers which are assigned to multiple physical servers, or farms. It uses virtual servers to intercept web traffic where it carries out load balancing across all physical servers assigned to each farm. Initial installation is simple enough as you use a serial port connection or connect a monitor and USB keyboard directly to the appliance. All you do here is assign IP addresses to each Fast Ethernet port, and enter your hostnames, VLAN IDs and name server information.

All necessary configurations are carried out from the appliance's browser interface which, although a little basic, does provide easy access to the various features. The appliance supports two modes of operation with a one-armed mode aimed at scenarios where a firewall already exists and all virtual and physical servers are located on the same subnet. For testing we used the two-armed mode which allowed us to separate our virtual and physical servers on different subnets.

The process of setting up basic farms is simple as you first define virtual servers by their IP address, port number and protocol. Next, you add your physical servers and each entry only requires the system's IP address. We defined a collection of Windows servers running web and email services, which were then assigned to our virtual servers. As far as our test clients were concerned, the appliance was completely transparent as we merely pointed their web browsers at the virtual IP address to access the required service.

There are five load balancing schemes to choose from with the default round robin mode distributing inbound requests to each physical server in strict rotation. The more powerful servers in the farm can be given a greater workload by applying weightings to each one, so new traffic can be sent to those that are least loaded.

If you have a farm of servers providing

different content, you can use rules to direct traffic to specific servers. These inspect HTTP content and requests for certain information are directed to the relevant physical server. For encrypted traffic, the connection is terminated at the appliance which then passes unencrypted traffic to the physical servers, thus relieving them of this extra workload.

A valuable feature is the ability to maintain persistent connections. The appliance employs basic Layer 4 inspection which uses source and destination addresses to ensure traffic from a particular client is always sent to the same physical server. However it goes much further, as Layer 7 inspection allows actual content to be used to determine persistent connections and you can use controls such as URLs, SSL session IDs and cookies, to ensure a host is always directed to the same physical server.

The LoadMaster 1500 undoubtedly brings web server load balancing and traffic management into the realm of the smaller business. It is particularly easy to install and deploy, and it offers a remarkable range of features at a very affordable price. **NC**

Product: LoadMaster 1500

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