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Umniah Improves Telecom Performance and Reduces Costs with Blue Coat Appliances

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Introduction

Umniah Mobile Company is the Kingdom of Jordan's fastest-growing mobile telecom operator with more than 2 million mobile and 25,000 broadband subscribers. This subsidiary of Batelco Group is playing a significant role in rapidly expanding Jordan's mobile and Internet capabilities in support of the kingdom's national agenda to modernize the country. Umniah launched its mobile operations in 2005 and acquired a leading Internet service provider (ISP) in 2007, becoming a full-service telecom operator offering GSM mobile, aged data services, and broadband Internet services for consumer and commercial customers.

Toward the end of 2007, Umniah launched the kingdom's first WiMAX Internet access services. This next-generation wireless broadband technology supports more than 60% of the service provider's Internet access customer base. In addition to its consumer subscribers, the company's broadband operations serve more than 400 corporate accounts, ranging from small businesses to large enterprises.

Umniah's growth mirrors the information and communications technology (ICT) initiatives laid out in the kingdom's national agenda. Since 2007, the company has seen a 300% increase in Internet traffic alone, much of which is streaming video and other multimedia traffic, creating huge demand for bandwidth from both the consumer sector and the corporate sector. Umniah's leadership in WiMAX has boosted demand even further as more customers are eager to take advantage of this higher-speed wireless technology.

Umniah's IT infrastructure team is responsible for managing the telco's ISP infrastructure and internal corporate IT operations. The dramatic increase in Internet access consumption forced Umniah to take a hard look at how the organization managed its bandwidth. Following the acquisition of one of Jordan's primary ISPs, the company realized that bandwidth was not being managed adequately and that there was a significant amount of unmanaged bandwidth consumption. As a result, certain types of applications and subscriber usage patterns were adversely impacting overall Internet service performance. Furthermore, rapid

Solution Snapshot

Organization: Umniah Mobile Company

Operational Challenge: Containing costs while effectively meeting the growing bandwidth and performance needs of demanding wireless and wireline customers of the Kingdom of Jordan's fastest-growing telecommunications provider. New WiMAX rollouts and increased demand for streaming video and other bandwidth-intensive services create further demand for better ways to manage bandwidth, especially over international links.

Solution: Umniah selected Blue Coat's caching appliance — including the new CacheFlow appliance — to better manage bandwidth and broadband traffic, as well as improve the user experience and deliver new, value-added services.

Project Duration: Umniah initially started with one Blue Coat appliance three years ago and currently uses six.

Benefit: Umniah has seen an 80–90% browsing performance increase, which has resulted in a 95% decrease in customer complaints. In addition, Umniah has reduced international bandwidth costs by 40–50%.

growth of the customer base, combined with the high cost of international transit bandwidth ($600 to $700 per Mbps per month) made provisioning Internet access a very expensive proposition for Umniah. Faced with escalating costs and customer complaints about performance, the company needed a solution to help manage its growth cost-effectively and scale its operations in line with user and traffic growth.

Implementation

After an exhaustive search for solutions to help control bandwidth usage, reduce operational costs, and enhance network performance and scalability, Umniah's IT infrastructure team selected Blue Coat's caching solutions. Blue Coat's caching appliances — the ProxySG and the newer CacheFlow 5000 appliances — facilitate improved wireless and wireline broadband communications for Umniah's customers by enabling in-region caching (and thus accelerated delivery) of media-rich Web content, large files, and video streaming.

Umniah initially deployed a single Blue Coat ProxySG appliance in its ADSL network and now has a total of six Blue Coat caches for the ADSL and WiMAX networks deployed at two of Jordan's international gateways. Expansion was quick and easy because the appliances could be added to the back end of Umniah's Layer 4–7 switches. All traffic flows through the Blue Coat appliances, making it easy for Umniah to manage growing bandwidth demands, even across expensive international links. The Blue Coat devices allow Umniah to pass along the savings to its customers and enable the service provider to add valuable services such as Web filtering and secure Web traffic.

The high-capacity WiMAX network features the more robust CacheFlow 5000 appliances, which help the company manage the increasing demand for this enhanced wireless service. WiMAX subscriber growth expanded 30–40% in three months following the first CacheFlow 5000 deployment. Automated configuration, based on policies predetermined by Umniah, meant that the CacheFlow installation could be completed in less than four hours.

Challenges

Umniah's biggest challenge in implementing the Blue Coat solutions was creating testing scenarios. Given the fast pace of network and subscriber growth, it was difficult for the company to determine the proper scope of testing because the supposedly extreme scenarios created for testing purposes quickly became reality in the production network. This rapid growth meant that the technology specifications established during the evaluation process (e.g., the number of concurrent connections, throughput, storage capacity, management, and response time) were moving targets. However, the scalability of Blue Coat's technology meant that Umniah could meet the accelerating requirements by simply adding more appliances.

Another challenge facing Umniah was whether to work directly with a product vendor or with a systems integrator that could customize a solution. Blue Coat's appliances were implemented as in-network technology (i.e., an internal use case), so Umniah's IT staff could work directly with Blue Coat to configure and install the devices. In addition, the ease of implementation of Blue Coat's products allows Umniah to scale the appliances vertically and horizontally with minimal outside assistance.

Benefits

The benefits provided by Blue Coat's appliances have been significant. First and foremost, Umniah has reduced its bandwidth costs by 40–50% using the CacheFlow appliances, reducing international transit bandwidth costs from $600 to $700 per Mbps per month to $75 to $80 per Mbps per month. As a result, Umniah realized a return on investment for the Blue Coat appliances in less than one year.

In addition to "hard" cost savings, the Blue Coat appliances also yielded indirect benefits. The bandwidth savings give the service provider's marketing team increased flexibility to create tiered pricing plans and new broadband services that can be targeted to a broader range of customer segments.

Umniah's broadband pricing is based on speed and download caps. Therefore, the service provider can sell low-priced, low-speed/low-capacity service bundles that still offer excellent performance and customer experience because the Blue Coat appliances speed up Web browsing by serving content requests from in-country caches instead of via (expensive) international transit links. This makes it easier for customers to stay within a tiered pricing plan cap that, in turn, has fueled subscriber growth by making broadband Internet access more affordable.

With the Blue Coat technology, browsing performance has improved by 80–90% and customer complaints are down by 95%. As a result, customer satisfaction has risen dramatically. Furthermore, Blue Coat technology features such as secure Web filtering allow Umniah to differentiate its offering and gain market share by providing value-added services such as parental control capabilities that can be bundled in with a pricing plan (for an additional fee) or positioned as an add-on service.

Blue Coat's caching devices provide Umniah with the flexibility to adapt to shifting subscriber consumption patterns. During the past three years of rapid Internet growth in the kingdom, peer-to-peer (P2P) traffic growth has declined while Web traffic is increasing dramatically. Today, Web (HTTP) traffic represents 80% of Umniah's total Internet traffic, with Web-based video accounting for 60–70% of this. Blue Coat's technology has video and streaming support, significantly improving overall network performance and helping Umniah to meet the demands of its young, media-hungry customer base.

Methodology

The project and company information contained in this document was obtained from multiple sources, including information supplied by Blue Coat, questions posed by IDC directly to Umniah Mobile Company employees, and Blue Coat and Umniah corporate documents.
