

Future Group gains strategic advantages after standardizing on the Cisco® (ACE) Application Control Engine

Customer Case Study



How Future Group leveraged the benefits of the Cisco ACE to increase business growth.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: Future Group

Industry: Retail, consumer finance, capital, insurance, leisure and entertainment, brand development, retail real estate development, retail media and logistics

Location: Mumbai, India

Challenge

- To rapidly scale its business applications to its distributed locations, while maintaining reliability, security and high availability
- To meet network demands of its rapidly growing customer base

Solution

Cisco® (ACE) Application Control Engine

Results

- Improved quality and productivity of services to customers
- Enhanced ability to handle growing application traffic
- Increased server performance by 75 per cent
- Greater capability to scale data center resources
- Accelerated time-to-service for new applications
- Reduced costs and savings in IT management

Challenge

Future Group is one of India's leading business houses with multiple businesses spanning across the retail consumption space. Future Group brings multiple products, opportunities and services to millions of customers in India. Through its 15 million square feet of retail space, it serves customers in 85 cities and 60 rural locations across India. As one of India's retail pioneers with multiple retail formats, around 300 million customers walk into its stores each year and choose products and services supplied by over 30,000 small, medium and large entrepreneurs and manufacturers from across India.

While retail forms the core business activity of Future Group, its subsidiaries are also present in consumer finance, capital, insurance, leisure and entertainment, brand development, retail real estate development, retail media and logistics. It also aims to be innovators in evolving delivery formats, creating retail realty, making consumption affordable for all customer segments.

In 2007, Future Group consolidated its distributed IT infrastructure across India to one centralized data center in Bombay. Future Group implemented Cisco's Service Oriented Network Architecture (SONA) as the backbone of its network – creating an open framework that allows Future Group to quickly implement network-based services, such as mobility, real-time communications, and virtualization. "Prior to this, we were actually a non-network centric business. With SONA, we don't have multiple data centers and we don't have servers in our stores," said Mr Parakh Dave, Chief Information Officer and CTO, Future Group.



“Since a portion of application traffic processing is handled by Cisco ACE, we’ve actually seen an increase in server performance by 75 per cent”

Victor Salve, Senior Manager, Future Group

Since its IT services are now centralized, Future Group had to ensure that they could rapidly scale their business applications to its distributed locations, while maintaining reliability, security and high availability. To support this, it needed an application load balancing solution that could meet the network demands of its rapidly growing customer base of approximately 50 million customers.

Solution

In searching for a solution, Future Group decided to leverage on its existing relationship with Cisco. “Five years ago, we were looking for a strong strategic technology partner that could line up with our actual business vision. Cisco has the experience in supporting the retail industry and presented a well-defined proposal that addressed our strategic needs. They also possessed a very solid team on the ground domestically and a robust partner network here in India. The pillars and the foundations of our business actually run 98 percent on Cisco products. From our store network to our core network to our office network to the data center, everything is Cisco centric,” explained Mr Dave.

The company decided to implement the Cisco Application Control Engine (ACE) to maximize availability, acceleration, and security of data center applications. Instead of achieving the same capabilities with numerous servers, load balancers and firewalls, Cisco ACE offered a range of capabilities, including load balancing, SSL offload, application Security and virtualization – all from a single Cisco ACE module that was integrated with their existing core network switch – the Cisco Catalyst® 6500 Series. “Cisco ACE fulfilled all of Future Group’s expectations for a suitable solution – which was simple to install, manage and compatible with our existing infrastructure,” Said Mr Dave.

Future Group took one month to integrate and implement the Cisco ACE module into its IT infrastructure, completing the process in the middle of 2010. “Cisco has served our needs well for five years, and the decision to continue with the Cisco infrastructure made a lot of sense for Future Group,” explained Mr Dave. “We looked to Cisco of what was the best practice to manage these assets. They took on an advisory role and pointed us in the right direction.”

Results

The results from installing the Cisco ACE module have been positive. Cisco ACE has improved the quality and productivity of Future Groups’ services to its customers, according to Mr Dave. “Cisco ACE has achieved all the objectives planned in the upgrade, which is to increase application availability, improve response times and generate higher productivity of our IT resources,” said Mr Dave.

One of the main benefits of Cisco ACE is its ability to handle their growing application traffic. With Cisco ACE, Future Group was able to launch the largest coalition pay back program in India. “We also have our loyalty apps running behind the Cisco ACE technology. With Cisco ACE, we’re able to service our customers better and are able to handle the volume and the scale of the business that we have,” said Mr Dave.

The application acceleration capabilities of Cisco ACE also improved the user experience. “Cisco ACE uses a range of acceleration capabilities to improve application response time, reduce bandwidth volume, and improve the efficiency of protocols.

“Our data center environment is about 90 percent virtualized, so whether we run our applications on Unix, Linux or Windows, with Cisco ACE, everything is load balanced”

Mr Parakh Dave, Chief Information Officer and CTO, Future Group



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With Cisco ACE, security is already built into its core fabric from the ground up. The Cisco ACE provides protection against application threats and denial-of-service (DoS) attacks with features such as deep packet inspection, network and protocol security, and highly scalable access control capabilities. “Frankly, that’s the other value proposition from a business perspective with Cisco. Security is inherent and built within its products. The intermingling of different devices and the security management with Cisco, they make sure we have seamless security across all our device types,” said Mr Dave.

Future Group also benefited from Cisco ACE’s versatility in a virtualized environment. With just one physical ACE module, it was able to partition this into five other logical ACE modules and assign them to different business services, enabling resource segmentation and service isolation. In fact, a single Cisco ACE module can scale to provide a defined level of service of up to 250 different business organizations, applications, or customers and partners. “Using virtual partitions, we can align the infrastructure more closely to our business operations with fewer devices and superior control, thus lowering operational costs,” said Mr Dave. This has substantially enhanced Future Group’s capability to scale its data center resources and accelerated its time-to-service for new applications. “Our data center environment is about 90 percent virtualized, so whether we run our applications on Unix, Linux or Windows, with Cisco ACE, everything is load balanced,” he further explained.

Since the implementation of Cisco ACE, Future Group has seen savings and reduced costs in their IT management. “From a cost benefit analysis, we are able to lower our cost base by 40 percent through leveraging on Cisco ACE. Instead of adding several servers, we are now monetizing what we already have instead of overly investing in other hardware. The simplicity factor of Cisco ACE is that everything is integrated; it takes the thinking out of everything. Operational management is always one of the big issues organizations face today. We only have two people managing our large scale network, which comprises of several thousand Cisco devices on our network,” surmised Mr Dave.

PRODUCT LIST

Data Center

- Cisco® (ACE) Application Control Engine
- Cisco Catalyst® 6500 Series Switches

Future Group has also experience savings from Cisco ACE's "pay-as-you-grow" licensing model. With Cisco ACE, costly upgrades are no longer necessary. Through a software-only license upgrade, Future Group can scale their capacity from 4 Gbps to 8 Gbps to 16 Gbps throughput on a single Cisco ACE module. In addition, up to four Cisco ACE modules can be deployed in a single Cisco Catalyst® 6500 Series Switch chassis to deliver up to 64 Gbps throughput: performance and scale far beyond that offered by any competitor.

Next Steps

With Cisco ACE in place, Future Group is looking to introduce innovative retail services that will empower its customers with technology as they navigate the marketplace for distinctive shopping experiences and value. "We are looking at the omni-retail channel that will enable our customers to shop with us anyway, anytime," remarked Mr Dave. "We will also be using Cisco ACE as part of our RFID infrastructure. We run one of the largest supply chain companies and the biggest warehouse in India, and Cisco ACE will play a big part in our warehouse management system that will go online very soon. Cisco will help us deliver the future of supply chain management," Mr Dave added.

For More Information

For more information on Future Group, visit www.futuregroup.in

For more information on Cisco® ACE Application Control Engine, visit <http://www.cisco.com/go/ace>



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