

An easier way to link with partners

Simple ad hoc internet platforms were once sufficient for the management of data transfers between financial services companies, but today they are reaching the limits of their usefulness. Eric Westerkamp of **EasyLink Services** explains to *Future Banking* how managed file transfers can effectively replace these overcomplicated networks.



As financial services organisations continue to outsource non-core functions, the amount of time spent moving critical and confidential files digitally between companies is growing rapidly. The existing methods of transferring this information are often not secure and, increasingly, not even up to the task of sending and receiving data.

The simplest ways of linking two organisations, email and FTP, leave a lot to be desired in terms of the control they provide over data. In many financial companies, these systems are on the verge of collapse, driven to exhaustion by the volumes of traffic they are being forced to deal with.

“What MFT applications do is provide an entire set of additional capabilities.”

It is not just the technology that is feeling the pressure. IT teams face the daunting prospect of managing hundreds of separate connections and, when something inevitably does go wrong, are poorly placed to track down missing files lost in the labyrinth of servers.

Managed file transfer (MFT) platforms have long been used to move data around within organisations but a new generation of providers aims to use similar technology to bring order to the chaos of external information flows.

Occupying the ground between a bank and its partners, EasyLink Services provides fully-hosted MFT services. Eric Westerkamp, the company's director of product management, sees the problem as finding ways to make sense of the torrent of data moving into and out of an organisation. “FTP is a great protocol, but it's not a great management tool,” he says. “What MFT applications do is provide an entire set of additional capabilities: they're a business layer on top.”

EasyLink replaces an organisation's tangled network with a dashboard that enables users within a bank and its partners to move and track files. Existing FTP connections are dismantled and rerouted through the MFT platform, with EasyLink employees performing the integration and providing ongoing support. The whole system can be brought online in a matter of days.

Business teams inside the bank are empowered by having greater visibility of the data and files. Whereas FTP logs might consist of thousands of lines of information, EasyLink's platform sorts and categorises information in an instantly intelligible way. If a partner has not received a file, IT staff do not have to be called in, because the end users can often solve problems themselves.

For the same reason, the system makes meeting compliance and security requirements more straightforward. For many organisations the systems they have in place are so poorly governed that establishing an audit trail is all but impossible. Westerkamp finds this worrying. “IT groups are asking themselves how many FTP servers are there in this organisation? They have no handle on the size of the problem.”

“They could find out pretty quickly,” he jokes, “by shutting off the FTP ports on their firewall. Then their partners are going to start calling very quickly.”

He sees EasyLink as providing not just the channel to move data but the tools necessary to impose control over it. The system can be set up to automatically produce daily reports about data flows and alert users to anything that might have been overlooked.

As cloud computing is adopted by an increasing number of businesses, services like that provided by EasyLink will come to have an even greater role to play. “MFT is just the first step,” Westerkamp acknowledges. “It's the transport but other applications for process coordination, intelligence and reporting are all going to be vital.”

Business teams are not often directly confronted by data management issues until something goes wrong. When it does, IT staff are the ones forced to delve into the murky world of servers and FTP logs to try and dredge up a missing file. They are not always successful and as the volume of transfers continues to grow, disruptions will become more common. In the face of these challenges MFT is no longer a luxury, it is a critical tool. ■

Further information

EasyLink Services International Corporation
www.easylink.com
Tel: +44 (0) 207 551 8700

