



Crocus.co.uk solves reliability and performance issues of its e-commerce web site with the Loadbalancer.org appliance

Online retailing is a cut throat business where customer loyalty is by no means assured, a single failure of the web site can have serious financial impact and negative publicity.

Since it launched in April 2000 Crocus grew its customer base exponentially. After the dust settled on the dot com boom Crocus was the only online gardening site to thrive and survive.

However the architecture of the site was very CPU intensive with over 4MB of custom ASP code. The single Windows NT web sever and database was quickly swamped by the growth in traffic and a CISCO 416 local-redirector was recommended and installed by the ISP. This sufficed for another year but when the IT Manager Gary Besta investigated the traffic projections it became obvious that the CISCO unit would not be able to cope with the load.

A short list of requirements were drawn up:

- The new load balancer would need to handle up to
- 1 million customers a day.
- Half of these customers would be in long SSL based shopping sessions.
- The solution needed to be a high availability clustered pair.
- The solution need to be easy to configure
- Traffic analysis functionality was required
- 24*7 Technical Support was mandatory

The CISCO CSS and F5 solutions were the obvious ones at the time, but when Loadbalancer.org contacted Crocus.co.uk and offered them a demonstration unit they were hooked.

Loadbalancer.org at a glance:



Loadbalancer.org Ltd have manufacturers of fast, high-availability load balancers since 2002. By focussing on high availability, ease of use and sensible pricing they have helped hundreds of customers with their infrastructure requirements.

Loadbalancer.org have a strictly no-nonsense approach and complete focus on load balancing. "When a single point of failure is not an option.", says it all.

"The fact that we had the two Loadbalancer.org appliances up and running as a high-availability pair in 10mins had me hooked. The down to earth and efficient Technical Support staff were the icing on the cake. Oh .. and I saved £20,000 from the allocated budget..." Gary Besta – IT Manager.

Over the last few years we have purchased another 6 Loadbalancer.org appliances:

- 2 for our acquisition of GoneGardening.com
- 2 for our Back office & Terminal Server environment
- 2 As Hot Spares and development environment testing

Planning for Future Growth

Because all of the user sessions are stored on a clustered shared storage MS SQL server we are aware that this will eventually become the bottle neck in our infrastructure. We are working in partnership with Loadbalancer.org and ClusterScale Ltd to design a shared nothing MySQL Cluster this is intended to give us unlimited saleability for the web site over the next 10 years.

"The whole of spring is really busy for plants and we get big seasonal spikes in traffic, especially Valentines day, Mothers day and Christmas. This used to be a nightmare for server performance but we can add our back up servers and even development servers to the cluster in seconds to vastly increase our capacity and customer response time.", Gary Besta – IT Manager.



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Crocus.co.uk at glance:



Since it launched in April 2000 Crocus has become the largest e-commerce supplier of plants, garden equipment and cut flowers.

No other company in the UK can offer such a comprehensive range of plants, trees and shrubs, with a choice of over 3500 varieties. The offering has proved successful with both the public and trade customers. In the past 5 years Crocus has built 5 Gold medal winning gardens at Chelsea.

crocus.co.uk