Four keys to effectively monitor and control secure file transfer

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Executive summary

As more information is digitized and more business data is considered critical, you're spending far more time managing that information, and its movement within your enterprise, with your partners and with customers, than you ever have before. Can your file transfer infrastructure handle the implications of regulations such as Sarbanes-Oxley and the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act? Are your network and the data that travel across it secure enough? Can your file transfer operations process the rapidly increasing volumes of digital data across disparate systems, platforms and protocols? How effectively does your file transfer infrastructure enable you to meet and proactively manage service level agreements (SLAs)?

By answering these questions, some leading businesses have discovered that proving compliance, ensuring secure data transfers and managing the high volume of data to meet service level agreements all have one thing in common: data must be visible across the enterprise. After all, you must know where the data is, and how it got there, to effectively manage it.

When you apply this primary key, and the three other keys described in this paper, to effectively manage and monitor the flow of business data, you can dramatically improve the security, auditability, service delivery and scalability of your file transfer operations.

You must be able to see your data – and know where it is and how it got there – from the beginning of a file transfer to the very end.

Key #1 – Make your data visible wherever it is in the network

New government regulations affect how companies manage data transfer

Regulations recently enacted in the United States and Europe hold your company and its executives accountable for tracking data, whether it is moved internally or between partners, suppliers and customers. How ready is your file transfer infrastructure to track that data?

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), for example, has strict provisions with respect to sharing employees' personal health data with third parties. Other regulations call for stiff imposing penalties on companies that lose or expose the personal and financial data of customers and employees. Besides risking government-imposed fines, companies that mishandle data may also lose customers and tarnish their brands and reputations with investors.

In this environment, you must be able to see your data – to know where it is and how it got there – from the beginning of a file transfer to the very end. After all, if you can't see your data, you can't manage it. A secure file transfer system that moves data reliably from one application or server to another allows you to comply with increasingly stringent information-security requirements – and enables you to proactively manage service.

FTP is difficult to manage because it provides no way for you to see where your critical data is, let alone control its movement or generate an audit trail.

Key #2 – Reduce or even eliminate ad hoc use of FTP.

Ensuring data security protects the network and the data traveling on it – and simplifies manageability

Many companies move data via File Transfer Protocol (FTP). For those companies, FTP may even be the standard file transfer solution. Are you aware that using FTP puts data, and the network it travels across, at risk?

For example, with FTP, client IDs and passwords are transmitted in clear text. Worse, standard FTP commands can be used to create denial of service attacks or exploit other network vulnerabilities.

Security risks aside, FTP is difficult to manage because it provides no way for you to see where your critical data is, let alone control its movement or generate an audit trail. Sometimes, in fact, data sent via FTP never reaches its destination, and the sender only knows if the intended recipient manually notifies the sender.

To ensure the security of and better manage your data and network, you need visibility from the beginning of the file transfer process to the end. That's why it's so important to reduce or even eliminate ad hoc use of FTP. Replacing FTP with a standardized platform for secure file transfer enables you to set and enforce security policies throughout your company and with others outside your organization.

Key #3 – Build scalability into your file transfer system.

As your company's data volume grows, so should your network's ability to transfer data

The volume of data that companies transfer is growing exponentially. That's because more types of information are being digitized and more companies are expanding trading partner networks. How readily can your file transfer infrastructure accommodate the growing volume of data?

Banks in the United States are now digitizing checks so that they can be processed more efficiently and quickly. If your company is involved in an acquisition or merger, or if your trading partner network is expanding as part of the company's growth strategy, data volume is probably growing exponentially. Trade secrets such as data-filled documents with product specifications or manufacturing design move frequently across global supply chains, and must be secured, too.

A secure file transfer system that easily scales to the size of your needs, and that accommodates multiple platforms and protocols, helps ensure your ability to handle the increasing volume of data.

Key #4 – Monitor data transfers from beginning to end.

Meet customer demands and service level agreements

Time is money. And nothing underscores that more dramatically than the need to quickly process customers' data. Because you have SLAs to meet, you must carefully monitor data transfers from beginning to end – for events and non-events. How much can you rely on your file transfer infrastructure to help you manage to service commitments?

A secure file transfer solution enables you to see the data movement in your network. With real-time visibility, you gain more focused insight for resource planning, because a secure file transfer system pinpoints process bottlenecks. And it highlights unreliable or inefficient file transfer solutions that need upgrading or replacing. A secure file transfer solution also enables you to customize alerts based on SLAs, and to define rules for exception handling. Perhaps most important, you can proactively resolve issues before they become failures – ensuring that you meet your service commitments.

The only way your file transfer infrastructure can meet your evolving business demands is if it lets you see data everywhere in the network.

Next step – Evaluate your file transfer operations.

How ready is your file transfer infrastructure to meet today's business demands? The only way your file transfer infrastructure can meet your evolving business demands is if it lets you see data everywhere in the network. Because your organization's business processes reach across a vast network within and beyond your four walls, data sharing plays an integral role in your company's success. Existing enterprise applications, like enterprise resource planning and departmental FTP servers, enable these processes.

However, you must evaluate the impact – and the cost – that unmanaged file transfers place on your business. Begin by answering these questions: Do you have business processes based on rapidly recurring file transfers at predictable or unpredictable intervals?

- Do you have business processes that depend on the transfer of especially large files that often exceed a gigabyte in size?
- Do you have business processes that rely on the transfer of data among hundreds or thousands of partners or customers?

- Do you have multiple lines of business using different, disparate applications?
  – Can those applications effectively exchange data to enable seamless business processes?

- Do you face corporate or regulatory mandates that require you to track and monitor data transfers?
  – Can you generate the reports those mandates require?

- Do you want to make IT more strategic to the organization?

- Do you wonder whether your enterprise data transfers are secure and working correctly?

Answering "yes" to any of these questions underscores the need to act quickly to improve your file transfer operations – to better prove compliance with government regulations, secure the data and the network, manage the increasing volumes of data and meet service level agreements.
Your answers to the following two questions may very well define how fast you must act:

- How much revenue does your company lose if it takes weeks or months to extend strategic multi-enterprise business processes to new partners or customers?
- How long do you want other departments within your company to continue establishing and using rogue systems to enable file transfer?

Help ensure security-rich, reliable data movement with solutions from IBM.

Secure file transfer solutions from IBM establish enterprise-wide control over your data transfer processes. The IBM® Sterling Connect® family of products provides the visibility and tools necessary to help ensure that data is safe-guarded, its delivery is reliable and auditable, and the file transfer infrastructure can better accommodate the growing volumes.

You need to act quickly to improve your file transfer operations to better prove compliance with government regulations, secure the data and the network, manage the increasing volumes of data and meet service level agreements.

For example, deploying IBM® Sterling Connect:Direct® supports your efforts to comply with government regulations and to safeguard the data that moves across your network. And IBM® Sterling Control Center gives you the visibility you need to better manage data and proactively manage to service level agreements.

IBM knows file transfer. Our solutions span from managed file transfer all the way to B2B collaboration. We can better help you establish enterprise-wide control over your data transfer processes. Our products provide the visibility and tools necessary to help ensure that data is safeguarded; its delivery is reliable and auditable, and the file transfer infrastructure can better accommodate your growing volumes. IBM can help enable your company to meet today's business demands – and provide a solid foundation to meet those of tomorrow.

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