

Avoiding network strain during sports season

Taj Elkhayat, Regional Vice President Middle East, Turkey and Africa for Riverbed Technology

After 17 days of intense competition, the Rio Olympics came to a close leaving behind some staggering figures. [11,303 athletes](#) took part in the games, [78 countries won medals](#), and [19 world records](#) were broken. Additionally, despite TV viewership for the games coming in at record lows, online viewership was shockingly high, topping that of London and Sochi combined. In fact ahead of the Rio Olympics, analysts predicted [6,755 hours of programming](#), with a whopping 2/3 of it being streamed online via websites and mobile apps, both at home and at work. Though organisations should have expected a lot of that online viewing to occur over their enterprise networks, according to [The Riverbed Global Network Strain 2016 Snapshot Survey](#), many were not ready.

With many key sporting events due to take place in upcoming months, organisations that haven't done so already must prepare for the significant increase in network traffic that will occur as a result of employees accessing and streaming online content and applications, and the related increase in volatility of that network demand.

Organisations are aware

[The Riverbed Global Network Strain 2016 Snapshot Survey](#) is an online survey by Wakefield Research of more than 400 IT professionals in the US, UK, Australia and Brazil, focused on whether organisations are prepared for the strain employees place on the network, and how IT plans to ensure network and application performance and availability does not suffer.

The survey showed the majority of respondents are well aware of the potential impact high profile sporting events pose to network and application performance. IT pros predict that most users (48 per cent) will use their desktop or laptop computers to view sporting events, followed by smartphones (34 per cent) and tablets (18 per cent). However, they also note that in the age of mobility, most employees will not limit

themselves to using just one device.

As a result, 85 per cent said that they were “likely” to more closely monitor the performance of their applications and networks, including Wi-Fi, while just 2 per cent reported being very unlikely to monitor their networks differently during these events.

Ongoing network issues

Looking at how past events affected network performance, the survey asked respondents if they have ever experienced issues with their networks, due to employees accessing content during popular sporting events. Unsurprisingly, the majority of companies (69 per cent) confirmed they have, with 30 per cent reporting the issues occurred more than once. Of the organisations surveyed, UK companies have experienced the largest number of issues (79 per cent), compared to 68 per cent in Australia, 66 per cent in the US and 65 per cent in Brazil.

A majority of all respondents (57 per cent) noted they are unsure of their abilities to protect their apps and network availability during sporting events such as the Olympics. Interestingly, Brazil’s IT professionals are the most prepared of all the countries surveyed, with 55 per cent feeling confident that they can maintain performance during sporting events. In contrast, 53 per cent of IT professionals felt confident, followed by just 38 per cent in the UK and 25 per cent in Australia.

Planning ahead

So how do organisations plan to protect their networks from increased streaming in upcoming months? The most common measures involve limiting employee access to the network (70 per cent), with 24 per cent saying this is something they will definitely do, and 46 per cent saying that they probably will.

This means 30 per cent of organisations will not restrict access to content using the company network. In fact, compared to 27 per cent in Australia and 20 per cent in the UK, 37 per cent of respondents in Brazil and 34 per cent in the US will not restrict sporting content. Interestingly, the last two are also the countries where IT professionals are most confident in their abilities to protect their networks.

The survey also revealed a division related to company size. While 61 per cent of organisations with more than 500 employees are less likely to limit access, 78 per cent of smaller companies plan to do so. This could entail bandwidth issues for large organisations. While they might have more network bandwidth, they will also have more employees logging on, putting strain on the network.

Winning the network protection cup

The first step to protecting the network during popular sporting events is establishing strict access control. However, the real key to preventing breakdowns is to implement real-time end-to-end monitoring over the entire network and all applications. Using the right tools, IT will be able to identify and remedy issues as they arise.

In addition, organisations should also:

- Bring siloed IT teams together to plan for any high-priority network events during this time.
- Prioritise and optimise company network traffic while reserving bandwidth so that business-critical applications stay reliable.
- Distinguish between company assets and employee-owned devices (BYOD). While the company may allow BYOD, it should limit access to the corporate network.
- Provide employees TVs for viewing in common areas to ease the load on the network.

More often than not, if employees are interested in a specific sporting event, they will watch it wherever they are, at home or in the office. In order to stay on track, organisations need to ensure they are in control of their network. Implementing visibility, optimisation and control best practices is the key to continued productivity, no matter which team is playing or which gold medal is at stake.