

Bourne Leisure

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 Jeremy Stancombe, IT Manager at Bourne Leisure



Bourne Leisure operates four of the leading online holiday and travel websites in the UK:
www.haven.com, www.havenholidayhomes.com, www.butlins.com and www.warnerleisurehotels.com.

□ The Full Story

Online holiday booking services are seeing huge growths in traffic, and Bourne Leisure’s websites (Haven.com, HavenHolidayHomes.com, Butlins.com and WarnerLeisureHotels.com) receive millions of visitors per year. Normally, their infrastructure averages 25,000 hits per minute, at around 4Mbps of inbound traffic and 20-30MBits of outbound traffic. However, in the weeks leading up to public holidays and school half-terms, these websites experience extreme spikes of traffic.

Ensuring that these sites and the applications that support them deliver a fast and fluid experience for each customer is of high importance, maintaining customer loyalty is vital. After all, shopping for a holiday shouldn’t be a burden; it should be filled with the pleasant anticipation of the holiday itself.

“Prior to the solution we did not have anything comparable, so everything is new and we now have functionality that did not exist previously. We have no performance or reliability issues now, which mean our day-to-day operations are quiet and predictable, just the way I like them to be!”

Jeremy Stancombe, IT Manager at Bourne Leisure

□ The Challenge

“Bourne Leisure had a limited web farm hosted in-house with most of our servers being hosted with third parties,” explained Jeremy Stancombe, IT Manager at Bourne Leisure. “We found that this gave us a somewhat inflexible service. We could not change or implement business requirements quickly, so we planned a major expansion of our web farm infrastructure to support all our brands in a more resilient, scalable and responsive environment.

“As part of our preparation, we looked at tools to allow us to maximize the performance of the new web farm, as well as technologies to cope with our four holiday brands, each with its own multi-server website. At that time, we evaluated the joint solution offered by jetNEXUS and Zeus Technology and we found that it opened up an entirely new set of options for us. I was convinced from talking with jetNEXUS that this was something we had to try.”

“Investigating our existing solution identified that our Web servers were simply doing too much, and buying bigger boxes just wasn’t going to help during peak periods. We needed a way of both reducing and spreading the load over multiple environments. Our booking engines require an interaction with customers, so it was vital that we have a way of maintaining a link between a specific server and a specific customer.”

■ An Immediate Impact

To accelerate the online applications of Bourne Leisure's multiple websites, they chose the jetNEXUS Enterprise Traffic Manager, with ZXTM software from Zeus Technology.

"The solution allowed us to dramatically reduce the work our Web Servers were doing. The initial TCP/IP 'handshake' was moved to the Enterprise Traffic Manager, and a large number of images were cached, reducing both the requests to the Web Server and the CMS database. The content compression allows even dial-up users to make their way through our booking processes faster. The SSL encryption and load balancing features allowed us to have many fewer Web Servers in the farm.

"The bandwidth used by the Butlins website has been reduced by 25% due to the content compression functionality. Pages on all Bourne sites now load in half the time they used to require, which has had a similarly dramatic effect on the transactions being completed. Caching has permitted us to use a smaller back-end database server than we would have otherwise needed to because we dramatically reduced the load on the SQL server by caching ColdFusion pages.

"Our new web farm consists of 2 jetNEXUS Enterprise Traffic Managers, a number of VMware hosts supporting between 20-30 Windows and Linux virtual machines. Each host is connected to the Bourne Leisure SAN which consists of a mixture of EMC Clariion and HP EVA arrays virtualized using LSI's Storage product."

"Looking back now I just do not know how I would have achieved all this in the time required to support our peak booking period without my 2 jetNEXUS Enterprise Traffic Managers! These appliances are very much loved now."

Jeremy Stancombe, IT Manager at Bourne Leisure

■ The Benefits

"Prior to the solution we did not have anything comparable, so everything is new and we now have functionality that did not exist previously. This has enabled us to divide up the Web Servers so that we can perform specific testing of new software, perform load testing against test or live infrastructure, and segment traffic based on predetermined URLs. All of this has enabled us to do things that we could never have achieved before. We have no performance or reliability issues now, which mean our day-to-day operations are quiet and predictable – just the way I like them to be!

"Following the implementation, we had our first peak booking period with no downtime at all. This was a first for us and immediately justified the purchase decision, not just in the minds of the IT team who were convinced of the theory but also our business operations colleagues who had backed our recommendation.

"Training and support has been excellent. Members of my team have attended training courses with Zeus and thought they were great, very helpful and extremely insightful.

"Looking back now I just do not know how I would have achieved all this in the time required to support our peak booking period without my 2 jetNEXUS Enterprise Traffic Managers! These appliances are very much loved now," concluded Stancombe, "When a new business rule needs to be implemented, we tend to think in terms of 'How shall we approach this?' rather than 'You want us to do what?' no matter how strange the request."

Contact Us

Cedar Court,
Grove Business Park,
Waltham Road,
White Waltham,
Berkshire,
SL6 3LW

Tel: +44 (0)870 382 5050
Fax: +44 (0)870 382 5520

Email: info@jetnexus.com
Web: www.jetnexus.com