

“Yes – we can secure the cloud” claims new test report

Date: Tue, 10/12/2010 - 17:36

Independent lab test confirms that security in virtualized data center and cloud computing environments is both possible and measurable



David Hill, Spirent's vice president for EMEA at NetEvents EMEA Press Summit Istanbul

Independent test lab, Broadband Testing, and test and measurement leader, Spirent Communications, achieved a significant breakthrough in securing virtual environments and allaying user fears about cloud based applications. A new report Secure Virtual Data Center Testing provides a detailed account of how HP TippingPoint's Secure Virtualization Framework (SVF) solution is able to create a secure virtual data center environment, resisting all recognized attacks. Even more significant is the way security can be rigorously tested under “real world” operating and attack conditions using Spirent's pioneering cloud computing testing solutions with performance, availability, security and scalability (PASS) methodology.

“Can we trust the cloud? The answer now is ‘yes,’” says Steve Broadhead, founder and director, Broadband Testing. “Virtual security works in theory but, until there was a way to test it thoroughly under realistic conditions, solution vendors have had a hard time convincing their customers. Without Spirent we could not have done this – the testing proved not only highly rigorous, but also quite simple to set up and run.”

“Testing a complex hard-wired system can be tough, but at least the structure remains static,” added Broadhead. “The Cloud is a good description from a network testers’ perspective of the relative shapelessness of the virtual environment. Until the test process itself could be virtualized, the cloud remained pretty opaque.”

Broadband Testing found the solution to this problem in Spirent Avalanche Virtual – the industry’s first test solution designed specifically for virtual and cloud computing environments. It was used in conjunction with Spirent Avalanche to test internal and external-to-internal traffic under normal operating and extreme conditions plus a wide range of attack scenarios.

All the threats in the HP TippingPoint signature base were successfully blocked, the only ones that passed were those not yet added to the then-current database.

As David Hill, Spirent’s vice president for EMEA points out, “The key takeaway was that testing with Spirent stressed the capability of the security solution right to its limits. People assume that security is the final objective, when what is really needed is a precise way to quantify and tailor the level of security in a complex system. ‘Tried and tested’ means more than any amount of theoretical argument in this case.”

The virtual environment under test was truly representative of the next generation IT environment in that it included physical and virtual elements – with the HP TippingPoint IPS and SVF, as well as the test bed itself, consisting of physical and virtual versions of Spirent Avalanche. Hybrid physical/virtual environments are fast becoming the norm, hence the reason to find new test methodologies to prove that these solutions actually deliver performance, security and scalability – all essential requirements of a data centre solution, as tested here.

“The economic benefits of cloud computing are overwhelming, but so are the security concerns of network operators and their customers” explains Hill. “This independent report breaks that deadlock, as reliable testing now makes it easy for system vendors to mitigate the risks of migrating to the cloud, while optimizing resource utilization under an exhaustive range of real-world operating and threat scenarios.”

Named the 2010 Best of Interop winner in the Performance Optimization category, Spirent Avalanche Virtual is recognized for its innovative approach for testing the performance, availability, security and scalability of virtualized network appliances as well as cloud-based applications across public, private and hybrid cloud environments. Avalanche Virtual’s emulation of real-world subscriber traffic scales to millions of subscribers.

This independent report builds on Spirent’s first Cloud Computing testing demonstration featured at Interop 2010. Following the success of this study, Spirent plans to add virtual data center testing to its test services portfolio.

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