BANDWIDTH MANAGEMENT

UNCLOG YOUR NETWORK

Prioritise traffic flow and get the performance levels you require, writes **Ciaran Buckley**

Cormac Reid, managing director of Comms-Online: 'Bandwidth management is relevant to large corporates, but it can also be relevant to SMEs that have large bandwidth requirements' MAURA HICKEY

Ireland's computer networks have become as clogged as the nation's roads but thanks to bandwidth management technology, companies can solve their traffic jams without shelling out ever-increasing amounts for extra bandwidth.

Bandwidth management is the process of ensuring that critical business information makes it from point to point as quickly as possible.

It involves a combination of server load balancing, as well as hardware and software devices, which ensure that the most important traffic has priority, while less important traffic waits its turn.

"Bandwidth management is relevant to large corporates, but it can also be relevant to SMEs that have large bandwidth requirements, such as a media company that needs to stream video to Britain," said Cormac Reid, managing director of Comms-Online. "It's really an issue for the high-usage sector."

Because more and more applications are using the network, including data intensive applications such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) as well as video, sound, images, e-commerce transactions and e-mail messages, companies find that they aren't getting the performance they need.

"The executives just want the application performance and the pressure is on the IT manager to deliver it," said Reid. "But then the IT department is told that it can't get the money unless it can prove the business case."

The cost of slow networks can easily be demonstrated. According to a recently published BT survey, the top 2,000 European businesses waste more than three million hours per year trying to unclog their networks or boost under-performing network applications.

The survey concluded that the cost of these efforts came to almost €250 million per year. A natural response to a slow network is to buy more bandwidth.

If you have a 1mbps broadband connection, then upgrade it to a 2mbps link. If you have a 2mbps connection, then get another one. But the problem with this approach is that it assumes that all traffic is able to get as far as the Wan of VPN link before it hits the bottleneck.

"There is a common perception that extra bandwidth solves everybody's problems, but 80 per cent of application performance problems are in the application and are not bandwidth dependent," said John Gillam, product manager at BT. "Many people are firing money at extra bandwidth instead of looking for servers that are overloaded."

Another approach to reducing traffic is to educate users about the effect that their activities have on the network.