

Underwater view of BP oil leak

I was at a client site recently trying to download a 100 MB Quickbooks update file and was wondering why the file transfer was going so slow.

After viewing my network monitor PRTG, which displays a graph of bandwidth consumption of the DSL Internet connection, I saw that well over 600 kbs of download activity had been going all afternoon.

That intrigued me enough to look at the activity on the individual Ethernet ports on the network switch to see who had been consistently consuming all that bandwidth for such a long period of time.

It did not take me long to find that two people at that company had live video streams going for half the day watching the oil flow out of that British Petroleum (BP) well in the gulf that blew out several weeks ago.

I had seen the underwater cam shots that were amazing on Fox News Channel, but this particular ROV (Remotely Operated Vehicle) had an incredibly clear view showing the oil shoot from the newly cut pipe nearly one mile below the gulf's surface. This oil industry client of mine then showed me a comprehensive Web page on BP's site to choose from any of the 12 cameras attached to the six ROVs.



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Since these ROVs were constantly maneuvering around the well head assembly at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico the cam shots would show different views of the disaster at different times.

I have found it difficult to get my security video cameras working good on land, in dry environments, with just 1000 feet of cable. How in the world do these BPs guys get these such vivid live color video from the frozen depths of 4,931.7 feet at the damaged well head?

I know that exact depth because it was displayed on the status screen in the upper left video display of the Skandi ROV2 cam. It is simply amazing to watch live the nation's, and possibly soon the world's, worst ecological disaster unfolding before our eyes.

This was either the best public relations move ever to enable the public to access these live color video feeds as they try to cap this runaway oil well, or it will add to BP's demise.

With millions of people logged into the internet now watching these numerous well cams the bandwidth and server infrastructure to handle the gigabytes of video per day is astounding. I would love to see the on-ship video gear that multiplexes the feeds from the ROVs and relays them wirelessly to the land-based communications towers.

There must be dozens of video caching servers at multiple BP datacenters that are duplicating and delivering the live feeds from those 12 underwater cameras. I am however glad I'm not in charge of their IT crew that is supporting this disaster view to the world.

Umpteen years ago I was the team leader for the Wide Area Network (WAN) department at British Petroleum's headquarters in West Houston. My first task, when I was put in charge of the outsourced WAN department back in 1992, was to map out the worldwide network of BP to see what we were responsible for managing.

After two weeks of discovering and documenting all the

Cisco routers that were all interconnected with private data links, since this was before the commercial use of the Internet, I put together a network map on the wall that displayed the 300+ BP routers all over the world.

This scared the crap out of me since our company, Paranet, had just been contracted by BP to deliver a 99.5 percent uptime for that world wide network.

My team and I quickly programmed a Sun Workstation to ping all those 300+ Cisco routers, document their availability times, and even alert us on our pagers when important locations went down. I then learned that the most important network nodes my team was responsible for were the large deep water oil rigs out in the Gulf of Mexico.

In December of that first year I had a problem communicating with a network node on the large BP America rig which was the similar to the Deepwater Horizon rig BP lost. After days of downtime which meant no digital rig production reports, I had to fly out to that rig 50 miles off the Louisiana coastline to fix the computer network link based on a 9600baud microwave signal.

It took me only five minutes to find the loose cable, plug it back in and revive the network activity. Unfortunately the fog rolled in which grounded our helicopter and stranded us for two days. I finally took a crew boat back to the coast and fed the fish the whole way due to heavy seas.

My two years running BPs network was both educational and enjoyable working with their employees from all over the world. They stressed both employee safety and took every precaution to protect the environment back then.

Over the past few years however, I saw on the ABC News that OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) has fined BP 760 times for safety violations. By contrast during that same time period, oil giant ExxonMobil has been fined only once. Wow, BP:760 and Exxon:1.

All that high technology built into the multi-million dollar blowout preventer at the well base on the gulf flow proved

worthless. The main reason was the battery was dead.

I'd put money down that there was some red blinking indicated telling the head driller the primary battery power to the blowout preventer was insufficient. That yahoo should be tarred with the very oil from that well and feathered.

Another client of mine told me that the whole explosion on Deep Water Horizon could have been avoided by an intelligent \$300 part on the air intake assembly in the diesel engines. If this technology had been previously installed on those engines they would not have over revved and blown up due to ingesting the escaping gas from the improperly cemented well.

What blows my mind that is that we can all watch the oil spill into the gulf live over the internet but the industry's best minds and talent cannot close-in the runaway well. I hope and pray the by the time this article runs that the vast majority of the oil spewing from the well has been stemmed.

This must happen soon to save our gulf coast and to prevent the Obama regime from pulling a Hugo Chavez by nationalizing BP before the end of the summer.

Bottom line: With high tech gear to find the oil, drill for the oil, and manage the oil we can now only helplessly watch it flow into our waters and then onto our beaches with that same high tech gear.

Next week's column: MAC hard drive health.

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