

Response To Riverbed Criticism Of Broadband-Testing Wan Optimisation Report on Blue Coat and Riverbed

By Steve Broadhead, Founder & Director, Broadband-Testing

I have been made aware of two blog posts from Riverbed employees on Riverbed blogs, criticising our recently launched report: Wan Optimisation Test, featuring products from Blue Coat and Riverbed. Well researched, objective criticism I have no problem with, but these blogs suggested that the report and its results were fixed and not under the control of Broadband-Testing, which is a complete fallacy. The blog on Riverbed's own website (the other is on Linked-In) is also factually inaccurate in what it claims the Blue Coat product is not capable of.

The accusations are so utterly inaccurate and – on a personal level – so completely insulting, that a response, I felt, was necessary and is written for Riverbed employees to read, should they care to take the time to learn the realities of life.

I am the founder of Broadband-Testing and the author behind the report Riverbed is attacking. I have already responded – over two weeks ago – to another Riverbed blog (http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Published-Report-BroadBand-Testing-showing-151524.S.56049378?view=&srctype=discussedNews&gid=151524&item=56049378&type=member&trk=eml-anet_dig-b_pd-ttl-cn) and this is a response to the latest one to come to my attention (<http://blog.riverbed.com/2011/06/why-do-some-vendors-pay-independent-testing-firms-to-rig-unfair-tests.html>).

First – we (Broadband-Testing) are completely hands-on throughout the entire test concept generation, testbed decisions, testing and – of course – reporting on the testing. This sounds obvious, and should be, but it is NOT the case with some test lab organisations. I know this because several of our clients also test with these other labs and let me know exactly how they work... For this report, the tests were chosen to be a combination of traditional and contemporary/future environments. Since we have only a given amount of time to test – and even this kind of testing takes several weeks of our time to complete from conception to completion – we effectively test subsets of key areas such as CIFS, SaaS, video etc. In terms of the configurations – we test like for like – i.e. one box versus another box. Otherwise, the situation gets impossible where one vendor has A box and another vendor has several different elements combined to achieve the same means to an end. Not only is this one example of what deters ISPs and similar from deploying WAN optimisation...

“To be perfectly honest, WAN Op products just add to the technical problems. We’ve been there, done that, got the T-shirt... we rather charge the customer a little more, keep it simple and have less support overhead, ultimately happier customers” – quote from Telecoms company in S. Africa that is a customer of another of our clients, the excellent UK-based VoIP optimisation company, Voipex.

... but it is an unrealistic comparison and objective proposal from a cost/management perspective. I don't think Riverbed realises that WE have to be fully responsible for our test conclusions in the sense that we have to be able to repeat said conclusions to ANY customer of said vendor client; in other words we simply cannot fabricate results - we speak directly with end users all the time,

sometimes do site visits, speak with them at seminars etc. Put simply, lying publicly is NOT an option for us.

All our test tools were public domain tools that ANYONE can download and repeat our tests with. There is no hidden agenda here. We always work either with public domain tools, or directly with our test equipment vendor partners such as Spirent, Ixia and BreakingPoint. In each and every case, the tests can be repeated.

In terms of the application areas selected, notably those that Riverbed performed poorly in – these were based on Gartner’s own evidence (e.g. “video traffic now accounts for over 52% of all Internet traffic and this is set to increase”). I don’t see Riverbed complaining to Gartner about its positioning in the “Magic Quadrant”. And do I take it that Riverbed does NOT pay any annual subscriptions to Gartner Group at all?

Back to the Riverbed comment on testing with the solution it now offers with Akamai – this announcement had not even been made when we concluded the testing but, as I explained earlier, we could not realistically have used such a solution in this kind of “like for like” test.

In terms of claims of it being obvious that we were “fixing” the testing because of the results being ludicrously one-sided. Has anyone at Riverbed actually read the whole of the report? Riverbed performed well in several of the tests as the results show. And the talk of “rigging” the illustrations of the results to negate any Riverbed advantages and magnify Blue Coat advantages? Where Riverbed came first in the tests, the advantage was minimal – often less than 1%. In the real world this is unnoticeable. However, it’s fair to say that any user would recognise the benefits of 10-100 times improvement against an alternative solution. Riverbed itself uses such figures to show its benefits against a “vanilla” configuration in areas where it accelerates traffic well (some of which we included in our testing, I AGAIN reiterate). For what it’s worth I can certainly point you in the direction of “independent” test comparisons that were blatantly one-sided. Just ask and I’ll send you links.

Reading the additional document Riverbed created – “Riverbed Rebuttal...” – some of the statements about what Blue Coat cannot do: for example, recognise filename changes when the content is the same – this is simply incorrect. Note – we cannot cover EVERY single test scenario – there simply isn’t enough time. However, I understand that Blue Coat has a document outlining how it can and does optimise in this kind of scenario. Please note, I have been working with WAN optimisation vendor clients who have been able to do this kind of thing for years. Perhaps Riverbed should explain why it doesn’t appear to support object caching? If you look back at the report we carried out with other WAN optimisation vendors earlier in the decade, you will see that we have measured up to 10,000 times improvement on pre-compressed files (e.g. .tar archives). And we didn’t make those figures up either...

Earlier in the blog entry Riverbed talk about why rival vendors try to get one up on it since they can never beat them in customer evaluation scenarios. Really? Funnily enough, that’s not what I’ve experienced in situations with other WAN optimisation clients of mine (not including Blue Coat even)...

The reality is that EVERY vendor/product combination has strengths and weaknesses. The question for us at Broadband-Testing is: how relevant are those strengths and weaknesses at any given point in time. We believe that the “new wave” application areas we included in the testing are THE most important optimisation areas going forward, as observed by Gartner and others. We also believe that optimisation solutions have to be as simple as possible to deploy and manage (and cost effective from day one) if WAN optimisation is ever going to become as mainstream as it should be. If you want me to qualify that statement, let me just give a simple example. Gartner reports that it expects the WAN optimisation market to be worth \$1.9bn globally in 2011. To put this into perspective, Oracle – large yes, but still a single, software company – generated \$8.8bn revenue in the last *quarter* alone. Unless companies in the WAN optimisation space recognise STILL the huge need for education and proof of concept, the market will never be the kind of size it should be. And Gartner’s own definitions don’t help here either. Why do you think Cisco doesn’t take this market seriously (and I know Cisco houses that, for example, manage £100m of BT networks annually who consider WAAS to be a bad joke)?

Finally, from an existing WAN optimisation vendor perspective – and this includes Riverbed, Cisco, Blue Coat, Expand, SilverPeak and all – not only are the rules changing as cloud becomes pervasive, but there are lots of new vendors coming to play in this space. And they have the benefits of watching what the incumbents have done well and badly and taking advantage of this. For example, two of my UK clients in the LAN optimisation/security space are about to launch WAN optimisation products. You’ll be able to read the reports on their technologies later this summer. And those figures won’t be made up either...