SOLIDSPEED
vs. AKAMAI

"CONTENT-DELIVERY SHOWDOWN"

PURPOSE IN LIFE

SOLIDSpeed Networks

"We Make Sites Run Faster" | "Delivering a Better Internet"

Akamai

DRAW. SAME NOBLE CAUSE.

MEET THE FIGHTERS

Jon Zeeff, CTO

"Hands on the task" type who's building his 2nd enterprise

Daniel Lewin, CTO

"Head in the books" type who's working on his 4th academic degree

Jon Zeeff founded Branch Internet Services, a web hosting and e-commerce provider, in 1993. He sold the company to Verio in 1997. He was responsible for improving Verio's performance in Boardwatch's backbone ratings from 20th to 3rd place. Prior to Branch, Zeeff spent 10 years as a partner at a software development and consulting firms that provided custom software for pharmaceutical research. He holds a BS in Computer Engineering from the University of Michigan.

Daniel Lewin co-founded "Stockamai" — as it is affectionately known in MIT circles — in September 1998 with a bunch of MIT geeks. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate at MIT's Laboratory for Computer Science. Previously Leaman worked at IBM's research laboratory in Haifa, Israel, while simultaneously completing two undergraduate degrees at the Technion (Israel's geek cradle). He is an officer of the Israel Defense Forces, having served in the country's military for over four years.

EDGE: SOLIDSPEED. PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT.

TECHNOLOGY

SolidSpeed speeds web downloads by moving content to cache servers that are closest to the end user. Its technology, like Akamai's, is DNS-based. SolidSpeed is capable of caching the entire site — images *and* HTML — so that the end user doesn't have to wait for the HTML to travel the congested public route. The company used commercially available caching and content distribution technology from a big-name, publicly traded vendor, which could not be identified before press time due to NDA issues. Its proprietary monitoring systems show that typical users see a 2-3x acceleration and 5x increase in reliability.

SolidSpeed's "pay as you grow" pricing scheme offers obvious advantage to smaller users. It's based on number of "hits". The size of each "hit" – i.e. each object on a web page – is assumed to be 13K (yes, even if the customer's site is loaded with single-pixel gifs!) As an example, 3 million "hits"/month costs $600.

Akamai's FreeFlow content delivery service speeds web downloads by moving content to cache servers that are geographically closest to the end user. Its "pull once, serve many times" technology is DNS-based. In other words, it takes a first request from a geographic locale to activate the caching process. Akamai caches only embedded objects, such as images (which, according to the company's web site, accounts for 70% of a typical site's content), but not HTML, which still has to be served from the customer's server – and potentially cause delays. The company's patented proprietary algorithms are used for selecting the best server and the optimal route in response to each request.

FreeFlow costs $2000 to start, plus $2000 per MB/second per month with a minimum 12-month contract.

EDGE: AKAMAI. FIRST MOVER ADVANTAGE.

SECURITY

In order to take full advantage of SolidSpeed's network, you actually have to sign up to become a paying customer. You may think that's the way all content distribute services work; well… not quite. Read on if you haven't heard about the recent uproar against Akamai's readily available back door.

Anyone can take advantage of Akamai's network by replacing a target image's URL with the generic URL of Akamai's cache (we tried "http://a1.g.akamaitech.net/7/7/7/7/whmag.com/test.jpg" and saw no performance difference compared to our paid account. See the Keynote test results below). This back door enables clued-in minors to circumvent content filterers such as NetNanny.

EDGE: SOLIDSPEED. THIS IS NOT THE CASE WHEN LOOPHOLES ARE GOOD.

WHAT *WH MAG* READERS MEAN TO THEM

SolidSpeed's business plan calls for heavy reliance on web hosting providers as a reseller channel. They're very eager to form a win-win relationship — bandwidth conservation and extra revenue stream for you, market share for them. If you ask us – go for it!

Akamai's PR department refused to provide *any* information for this comparison and declined our interview requests. Hmm… 20,000 web hosts are not important enough an audience? You be the judge. Not to be deterred, we had to sign up as a customer.

EDGE: SOLIDSPEED. THEY GET IT.

KEYNOTE TEST RESULTS

The kind folks at Keynote monitored three URLs for us between August 24 and August 31: A 50K test image loaded onto SolidSpeed's content distribution network (Yellow); the same image, Akamaized through our paid account (Red); and the same image, fed through Akamai's back door (Blue). The results are compared against Keynote's Business 40 index (Green).

Keynote's Business 40 Index measures the average time it takes to download of the first 10K of the top 40 business web sites. SolidSpeed's services are obviously effective as it consistently downloads 100% of our 50K test image faster than the top 40 sites manage to reach their first 10K mark.
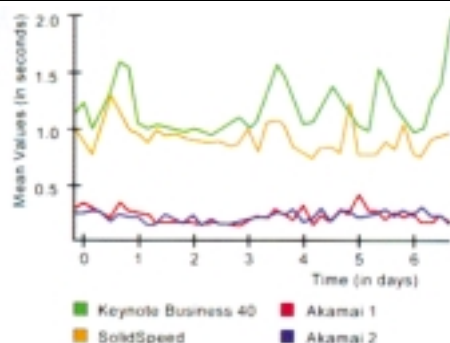
Akamai rocks in this test. Its average download time is about 4 times shorter than SolidSpeed. But note that there is no difference between the performance of our $2000 per month account vs. the free for all, through the back door test.

EDGE: AKAMAI. HANDS DOWN.

VITAL SIGNS AND THE MARKET

Company size: 16 employees as of press time

Financials: Privately held; expects to have positive cash flow in 12-18 months; looking to close second round financing to follow $2.3 million seed funding

Deployment: 5 servers as of press time — but with the technology in place, deploying additional caches is a no-brainer.

Competitive Landscape: Our hats off to SolidSpeed. For now it's the only company to have even thought of providing content distribution services for small to medium-sized businesses. That's many, many millions of customers.

Company size: 850 employees as of press time

Financials: Publicly traded with market cap of $7.7 billion as of press time; $27 million in FY 1999 sales; $43 million in Q2, 2000 losses

Deployment: 4000 servers

Competitive Landscape: Akamai reminds us of an unpopular high school kid whom everybody's always ganging up against. First AOL and Inktomi forms "Content Bridge", then Cisco launches its "Content Alliance", both aiming to squeeze Akamai out of its niche.

EDGE: AKAMAI. FOR THE TIME BEING…

AND THE RESULT IS… DRAW 3:3

KEEP AN EYE ON SOLIDSPEED – FINALLY, CONTENT DISTRIBUTION FOR THE REST OF US. LOOKING INTO OUR CRYSTAL BALL, WE SEE A "CONTENT DISTRIBUTION" CHECK BOX APPEARING ON MANY DEDICATED SERVER AND HIGHER-END SHARED HOSTING ORDER FORMS VERY SOON. WATCH THIS SPACE FOR A VICIOUS REMATCH!