perspectives

by richard kenny

Ragula Bhaskar

Clusters to rely on

Fat Pipe? It's an unlikely name, more likely to bring a grin to those who encounter it for the first time. Certainly, FatPipe Networks' 82 employees and co-founder and CEO Ragula Bhaskar are smiling, and for no small reason. The inventors of an increasingly popular routing cluster have a lot of success under their belts.

After nearly 20 years in business, FatPipe clients include 16 of the top 100 hotels in the United States and 13 of the top 100 law firms. Other clients include the F.B.I., Northrop Grumman, West Corp, Julliard School of Music at New York and Tyco International; and the list is growing. As is Bhaskar's reputation and influence in Utah; this year the Utah Economic Development Board named Bhaskar one of the top 25 High Tech CEO's in Utah, he was a finalist for Ernst and Young's 2005 Entrepreneur of the Year Award, and he has just completed an assignment for Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr..

Originally from Chennai, India, Bhaskar came to the United States in 1981 to continue his education. His soft-spoken, easygoing demeanor belies a frenetic experience in the States. His first seven years were spent at Pennsylvania State University where he earned a dual Master's degree in engineering and operations research plus a Master's degree in business administration with specialization in Finance., and a doctorate in engineering. Shortly after this whirlwind of accomplishment, Bhaskar was on his way to the Beehive State to teach at the University of Utah. One year later, FatPipe was born.

In 1989, with just $265,000—chiefly supplied by friends—and 12 employees, Bhaskar and his wife Sanchaita Datta created technology to help companies avoid the expensive cost of Wide Area Network (WAN) downtime: FatPipe routing clusters. Essentially, routing clusters increase the reliability of a company's Virtual Private Network (VPN)—even when there is a line failure. FatPipe routing clusters support WAN infrastructures by providing high levels of redundancy, reliability, speed, dynamic load balancing and additional security of IP traffic.

The invention was the result of some brainstorming sessions just as the Internet began changing the way the world communicates. "In the '90s we saw two issues come to the forefront. Communications became very important, as did bringing about clean energy. We felt communications was the most important," Bhaskar says. After generating some ideas, sifting through them for patents and going through them again to streamline their ideas, Bhaskar hatched the brainchild of bonding multiple lines for multiple carriers in 1995. Bhaskar acknowledges that the arrival of the Internet helped in hatching their routing cluster.

"The quality of public lines was very poor. There were a lot of carriers, big and small. They all had brand new technology and were expanding rapidly with other systems in place to control the quality of service. We came up with the concept [of] bond[ing] multiple lines using multiple data lines...We wanted to make it so simple that if you could install a modem, you could install a fatpipe."

Today, his goal at FatPipe Networks is simply to continue growing. Right now they are the sixth fastest growing company in Utah (Mountain West Venture group top 100) and the 189th fastest growing company (Inc. 500) in the nation. "We want to sustain that level of growth," Bhaskar says. FatPipe is rapidly expanding in Europe through their office in the United Kingdom, and is looking to expand in China and Australia.

Bhaskar says many new companies in Utah are generating a plethora of good ideas, but hiring trained employees may be a challenge for the fledgling upstarts. He says creating more technology programs could be the answer to that problem.

"As a company grows you need more and more expertise. I think more companies are running into a 'critical mass' problem of not having the demographics to support growth past a certain stage," he says. "Companies driven by technology—companies like Novell or Evans & Sutherland—are able to grow fast within the state. I think we need more technology programs in colleges and universities in order to create a base of employees such as you find in Silicon Valley, Austin or Massachusetts. However," he adds "growth past a certain stage will continue

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continue to be a big concern."

Beyond FatPipe, Bhasker has increased his community involvement as a consultant to companies such as Utah Power and Light and FMC; as a member and trustee of the Public Policy Committee of the Utah Information Tech Association; and as a member of various advisory committees. He is the recipient of several honors for academic achievements and has authored over 30 articles. Bhaskar holds four patents and has filed for several additional patents and invention disclosures.

Recently, Bhaskar finished an assignment from Gov. Huntsman as co-chair of the Review Committee for Boards and Commissions that oversees approximately 374 boards and commissions for industry and social affairs. "We focused on those we felt were most important from a government perspective," Bhaskar says. "We gave our recommendation in a presentation as to what is needed to make them function better, how they could better serve the needs of the people and how they could further the agenda of the government."

And doing better seems to be the Bhaskar way. Whether improving communication with high-tech inventions or contributing to the community through service, Bhaskar is well on his way to clustering his positive efforts to make a difference in the world. iQ

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