Managed Services Provider Serves Customers Better with Wire Data

ACS SOLUTIONS
ADVANCED CORPORATE SERVICES

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— Alexander Neumann, Leader, Network Management at ACS

COMPANY PROFILE

ACS Solutions GmbH (ACS) is a managed services provider, delivering hosting, application and infrastructure, and cloud computing services.

CHALLENGE

Lack of visibility into Citrix performance problems meant not only unhappy customers, but failure to satisfy SLAs.

SOLUTION

Analysis of ACS' wire data delivered critical insight into performance across the entire infrastructure, including the Citrix environment.

BENEFITS

- Dramatically improved performance of hosted applications
- Better defined KPIs and SLAs
- Visibility and insight for multiple teams within ACS

CHALLENGE

ACS Solutions GmbH (ACS) is a managed services provider, delivering hosting, application and infrastructure, and cloud computing services to customers. Like all managed services providers, delivery of applications to customers is governed by stringent, performance-based service-level agreements (SLAs).

Like many managed services providers, ACS relies on Citrix for its hosted applications; however, lack of visibility into Citrix resulted in frequent challenges. Launch and load times were often sluggish, and customers experienced performance degradations. This resulted in failure to meet stringent performance-based SLAs for ACS application hosting services. To make matters worse, two of the applications that struggled the most were Microsoft NAV and Microsoft CRM. These two applications are used by nearly all of ACS 50 customers, and account for more than half of ACS' annual revenue.

In order to meet their SLA commitments and keep customers up and running on these and other critical applications and infrastructure, ACS needed a way to detect performance problems and service degradations quickly. They also needed prescriptive guidance for remediating those issues before they impacted end-users. Previous efforts including an SNMP-based open-source solution for network monitoring and the Nagios Check_mk plugin for server monitoring failed to deliver efficient Citrix visibility, let alone guidance, that the IT team required.

SOLUTION

Looking for a better way to gain critical visibility into Citrix, ACS turned to ICS GmbH to help them find a solution. ICS GmbH brought in ExtraHop.

From Network Troubleshooting to IT Operations Analytics

Initially, ACS looked at ExtraHop as just another network monitoring tool. It wasn't long, however, before the broader IT organization began to see bigger potential.

The application team was the first to line up, looking to ExtraHop to provide prescriptive guidance in managing and troubleshooting complex applications delivered over Citrix.

"With the ExtraHop dashboards we were able to focus in on key protocols and quickly achieve a level of transparency we didn't know was possible in Citrix," said Alexander Neumann, Leader Network Management at ACS. "It was like putting on a pair of eyeglasses for the first time. We didn't know how blind we'd been until suddenly we could see."

BENEFITS

With real-time insights across the entire IT environment, from the infrastructure to hosted applications, ACS is using wire data from ExtraHop to transform their IT operations from reactive to proactive. This means not only meeting SLAs, but delivering better performance and availability of the business-critical applications ACS customers rely on.

"Before ExtraHop, we struggled to clearly define SLAs. Our KPIs were very technical, and focused on discrete elements like CPU, memory, and network performance," says Thomas Linder, Managing Director, ACS. "Now, we have the insight we need to define sharp KPIs based on both performance as well as the benefits accrued to the business in terms of cost-savings and efficiency."

Unprecedented Insight Into IT Performance

One of the first issues that ACS spotted when the ExtraHop appliance was deployed was a high volume of DNS errors. "We plugged in the box, and all of a sudden we're seeing all of these DNS errors that our other monitoring tools had never even caught," said Neumamnn. "With ExtraHop, not only did we quickly catch the errors, we were able to watch the traffic as it traversed our datacenter, pinpoint the source of the errors, and fix the problem. Wire data didn't just identify a problem, it gave us a solution."

Managing Citrix Performance Across Tiers

For ACS, the most important performance indicators are the launch and load times for applications delivered over Citrix. With ExtraHop, the ACS team can see not only what's happening in the Citrix environment, but how other parts of the IT infrastructure are impacting performance. "In IT, it's easy to say in the abstract that nothing exists in a vacuum. In practice, however, it can be very hard to prove," said Neumann. "ExtraHop has, for the first time, given us the ability to get a correlated view across all tiers, allowing us to understand how different systems are impacting each other, and spot problems before they impact end-users."

Keeping Customers Happy

With ExtraHop, ACS is improving not only the performance of applications, it's improving relationships with customers. "Our customers trust us to keep their critical applications not only running, but performing at their peak," said Neumann. "The cross-tier visibility we get from ExtraHop lets us focus not just on basic application availability, but on making things faster, easier, and more seamless for our users."

ExtraHop Across the Organization

Currently, ExtraHop is used by the infrastructure, networking, and helpdesk teams at ACS, but the company plans to expand the use of ExtraHop to several additional teams in the near term, including support and operations, as well as incident management. "We brought in ExtraHop for network monitoring, but it quickly became apparent that their wire data analytics platform can add value not only in the network, but across our business. We're actively working on developing new use cases, and expect to see great results."

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ABOUT EXTRAHOP NETWORKS

ExtraHop is the global leader in real-time wire data analytics. The ExtraHop platform analyzes all L2-L7 communications, including full bidirectional transactional payloads. This provides the correlated, cross-tier visibility essential for today's complex and dynamic IT environments. The ExtraHop platform scales up to 40 Gbps and deploys without agents in 15 minutes.