GROUNDWORK

CASE STUDY:
RUDOLPH AND SLETTEN

West Coast Construction Company Leverages GroundWork Monitor to Build a Stable IT Management Infrastructure

CHALLENGES

- Hodge-podge of disparate systems
- Unstable IT environment that included daily outages
- Expensive lapses in employee productivity
- No internal monitoring tools

RESULTS

- Increased systems uptime from 80% to 99.99%
- Improved visibility into information about the IT infrastructure
- Increased ability to pinpoint problems before actual failures occurred
- Improved capacity planning
- Increased leverage with suppliers
- Ability to have a working solution in weeks—not months

INTRODUCTION

For five generations, Rudolph and Sletten has constructed buildings that have helped to define Silicon Valley. The company is responsible for many of the area's corporate campuses and more recently it has stepped up to the construction demands of the biotech, health care and medical device industries.

Rudolph and Sletten projects include facilities for Kaiser Permanente, City of Hope, The University of Southern California, Microsoft, Sun Microsystems and Veritas and one-of-a-kind buildings such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Throughout the company's history, one thing has remained constant—its rigorous attention to detail and commitment to the highest quality.

PROBLEM: CONSTANT FIRE DRILLS

When Sam Lamonica came on board as IT Director of Rudolph and Sletten in 2003, he inherited a hodge-podge of proprietary network systems. The business systems were open source tools—tools with no established best practices or standards and a great deal of undocumented custom code. The IT environment was highly unstable and daily outages were causing significant lapses in productivity.

Typically, the IT team wasn't the first to know when IT problems arose. They found out when employees called or stopped them in the halls. "The team was in a constant state of fire drills," he explains.

The first order of business was getting real-time information on the availability and performance of the company's systems and applications. "Rudolph and Sletten has a reputation for creating state-of the-art buildings and we needed to live up to that same image internally," says Lamonica.

SOLUTION: GROUNDWORK MONITOR

For Lamonica, the logical starting point was a solution that would offer monitoring and surveillance of all of the company's IT components. The solution should support three regional offices as well as its headquarters in Foster City, CA. It should also support some 50 construction job sites at any given time—projects which last anywhere from one to ten years. All told, the solution needed to oversee more than 60 servers and 100 network devices that support a base of 600 full-time employees, not including subcontractors.

Cost was a consideration. Lamonica needed a solution that was reasonably priced and he didn't have the time or budget for excessive administration. He also required a solution that could be deployed in a matter of weeks, not months.

Lamonica quickly ruled out commercial frameworks as being too expensive and feature-bloated. "I have implemented these large frameworks in the past. Not only is implementation time four times longer, but these systems require constant babysitting," he explains.

The company wanted to leverage an open source platform, believing in the inherent flexibility and value of open source software. "With open source, we tap a large and active community and can take advantage of good things they are doing in terms of evolving the tools," Lamonica says.

After a careful review of the options, Lamonica opted for GroundWork Monitor Professional, an open source-based solution that monitors applications, network equipment, servers and other components to assess availability and performance. Built upon best-of-breed open source tool, GroundWork Monitor Professional offers significant functionality enhancements as well as deployment services and support.

But Lamonica says the primary reason for selecting GroundWork was the company's superior deployment and consulting services, which translated to a rapid implementation. "The most significant driver was GroundWork's professional expertise, especially in design, configuration and tuning," he explains. "The ramp up time for these solutions can be significant. By bringing in GroundWork, our entire infrastructure was being monitored within weeks."

Today, GroundWork Monitor Professional surveys a number of the company's critical business applications including Microsoft Exchange and Microsoft Outlook, the company's ERP, CRM and HR systems as well as its construction management application, financial platform, document imaging application, Citrix solution and two AS400s.

RESULTS: STABILITY, VISIBILITY AND STRATEGIC IT MANAGEMENT

The results have been significant for Rudolph and Sletten. First and foremost, its 14-person IT team is no longer plagued with outages. Availability has reached 99.99%—up from an average of 80%. "Bottom line, we are no longer getting stopped in the halls about systems that aren't working," says Lamonica. "We are the first to know when anything fails, and we are up and running before the first call comes in."

Visibility of information has also improved. "Now we have a true sense of event correlation and root causes, instead of feeling like were chasing shadows," he says. The company is now able to look at points of failure to see where the weaknesses lie. And now that IT management is stabilized, the solution is helping to support more proactive capacity planning. Finally, GroundWork Monitor Professional is delivering data that helps the company make smart decisions and better manage its vendors. "We can monitor our broadband lines, for example, and this data gives us leverage to ask our vendor to clean up faulty connections," says Lamonica.

Having transformed a chaotic IT environment into a well managed and stable IT organization, the Rudolph and Sletten IT team is spending far less time doing break-fixes and can focus on the deployment of innovative new technologies. This includes leveraging wireless technologies, not just at the corporate and regional levels, but moving out to the job sites. "Eventually, entire job sites will be wireless," he explains. "Frankly, we would never have had the time to explore these kinds of options before."

ABOUT GROUNDWORK

GroundWork Open Source, Inc. provides open source-based IT infrastructure management solutions such as network and systems monitoring, service desk management and IT dashboards. GroundWork's solutions enable IT management to leverage the flexibility and low cost of open source tools to achieve enterprise-level availability, performance and operational efficiency for a fraction of the cost of commercial software.

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