

TOOL SPRAWL: THE ANTITHESIS TO PRODUCTIVITY

Digital transformation is ubiquitous. Every forward-thinking organization is racing to embrace new technologies such as public clouds, containers and microservices architecture in order to drive innovation and gain a competitive edge.

However, as these technologies are adopted and incorporated, it adds more complexity to the network. According to IDG, at a typical enterprise company, employees use approximately 60 different applications. When you then factor in the current working from home situation¹ and that many employees will be multitasking, toggling between applications quickly and leaving them running, it starts to show how much pressure the IT system is under. Teams will do what makes their lives easier, downloading (often unnecessary) tools which IT is unaware of in a bid to improve their user experience.

To try and contain the situation, siloed IT departments often begin using new IT monitoring tools to take control. They want to gain visibility into the performance of the increasingly complex applications that their organizations have just introduced. The outcome however is a heterogeneous mix of decentralized systems and processes that don't communicate well. Or, more prosaically, tool sprawl.

Best practice IT operations can't be built on this bed of sprawling digital infrastructure, and needs cutting back and refining to add true value. IT leaders need a clear and holistic view into their systems to catch and fix issues before they cause downtime, while simultaneously supporting growth and innovation.



The challenge to overcome

A major roadblock in this quest for efficiency is that many organizations are built on legacy systems which can't be ripped out and replaced. Legacy technology is a barrier to the innovation, agility and performance which many businesses require to be the responsive companies they want and need to be in today's hyper competitive marketplace and economic uncertainty. The problem they face is that legacy doesn't communicate well with modern architecture and many corporations have combined the old with the new (digital) to keep operations running smoothly. But this in itself is an issue as the systems don't interlink; increasing complexity due to the management of increasing volumes of clouds, servers, applications and endpoints.

Another missing piece of the jigsaw is that many IT professionals don't see the value in IT monitoring. This is because it's historically been viewed as little more than a utility, rather than something that can drive value by enhancing IT service delivery, decision-making, and the customer experience. This outdated approach extends to what is being monitored: the focus being on availability and health rather than performance and user experience. Investments in the technology are usually reactive, in response to problems but not in anticipation of emerging requirements such as the roll-out of new applications.

What is more, organizations are using tools which only provide a fragmented view of the system – not a complete one. So, instead of providing the end-to-end visibility they crave, they instead add more tools to the mix, exacerbating inefficiency and lost opportunity, alongside no value.

¹Drafted during the COVID-19 pandemic, April 2020

Impaired performance

According to Gartner, this is not an uncommon issue, with tool sprawl named as one of the 10 most common challenges facing CIOs. However, in reality it affects the whole IT team. With so many tools in the system, IT staff need to become experts in several platforms, alongside monitoring for potential upcoming issues. When they are not sure of the landscape they are meant to be monitoring, they become overtaxed and don't receive the support they need – operating in a reactive way as opposed to driving a strategic culture.

When problems do arise, the result is that IT teams can take, on average, between three and six hours to pinpoint performance issues with so many tools; as they need to sift through various layers of technology to ascertain what happened – none of which provide a clear version of the truth. Centralizing IT monitoring is the only way to achieve true visibility, as it shows what is going on, when. This should also be done through a single pane of glass, meaning one version of the truth is relied upon and a clear timeline of events provided.

Without the right IT infrastructure in place to support modern tools and older legacy systems, organizations will not be able to have a cohesive IT stack – leading to business silos and stilted IT operations.

Diverts downtime

The consequences of not implementing comprehensive IT monitoring via a single pane of glass can be vast. Alongside the day-to-day benefits such as controlling tool sprawl, there is also the financial argument – it lessens the likelihood of downtime. Downtime is one of the most dangerous business issues any organization can face. While Gartner's estimate that downtime costs \$300,000 per hour is still seen as the most accurate benchmark, the less tangible reputational consequences must also be factored in. British Airways, banks internationally and Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp have all seen significant outages; affecting customer experience and provoking widespread condemnation.

The long-term effects can sometimes be hard to pinpoint, but the case of TSB should be a warning – it lost 80,000 customers as a result of IT outages which left some customers locked out of their accounts for weeks. In total, it lost £330 million thanks to the episode – a financial hit which few could manage.

Time to bring everything under one single pane of glass

Tool sprawl affects every part of the employee experience, and according to Hubspot, 82% of employees lose up to an hour every day just managing all of their tools; forcing them to cut back on key tasks such as revenue-generation.

For CIOs and IT leaders looking to digitally transform their business and get a firm grip on operations and productivity, the only way to achieve this is to centralize IT monitoring under a single pane of glass – driving business value as a result. Only by seeing everything holistically can they have a unified view of today's dynamic yet disparate infrastructure – while pinpointing applications which can be removed and unplug the user application pipeline.

Not only will it help control and reduce tool sprawl, thanks to IT teams having accurate depictions of which tools are where on the system, breaking down silos and data sprawl simultaneously; but it also supports a better-connected enterprise. Legacy tools can be accurately monitored, preventing potential failures or catastrophic cascading effects; as a clear timeline will be available to trace the route of the problem.

Perhaps most importantly, IT monitoring via a single pane of glass can help drive business value by enabling faster time to market for digital transformation projects – which issues like tool sprawl can in fact inhibit or delay. It also enables the visibility needed to communicate the value of IT to business leaders, showing how the department is helping meet objectives. Sharing dashboards can enhance the reputation of the CIO and department simultaneously, while also driving valuable savings via increased uptime and negating money spent on unnecessary apps.



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