Smart & Final Uses SL's RTView™ for Retail APM

Smart & Final is a leading big-big box retailer in the western U.S. serving both wholesale and retail markets for food, supplies and culinary equipment. They operate 282 locations in California, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, Nevada, Idaho, and northern Mexico. With continued expansion across the western United States in recent years, Smart & Final launched several infrastructure initiatives to optimize their business processes across all locations. As part of this, they implemented a new supply chain management system, Aldata's GOLD. Ensuring that GOLD was running at optimum levels and properly interacting with underlying machines, applications, databases, and processes was critical to Smart & Final's bottom line.

Business Challenge

Smart & Final needed real-time operational visibility. In early 2006, they experienced a couple of minor downtime incidents where visibility wasn't good enough to solve the problem quickly. With the average "downtime cost per hour" for the retail industry estimated between $140,000 and $1.1 million, they wanted to be sure, going forward, that they would be able to highlight and address operational issues before they became costly problems. It was also becoming increasingly necessary for operations to involve IT staff to resolve issues, lowering productivity.

Their primary challenge was to provide a single, real-time view across a complex heterogeneous environment. They had just transitioned from a mainframe-centric environment to a distributed system environment where IBM AIX and Windows became their main server platforms. They had both Oracle and SQL Server databases, along with various database management tools. From an application perspective, there was extensive use of TIBCO BusinessWorks and Hawk. They had just implemented the GOLD supply chain management system, developed their Information Delivery DataBase (IDDB), and integrated their new financial application (Lawson) and store ordering application (PromoCOPS). They also needed a thick-client deployment for operations staff to eliminate possible points of failure running through a web server, and a thin-client deployment for everyone else.

Their secondary challenge was delivering this visibility in a way that made the operations and IT teams more effective. They needed to provide enough information to address issues without overwhelming everyone with data, and they needed to allow each group to work with their favorite tools to streamline the resolution of problems.

Why RTView?

Smart & Final initially tried the TIBCO Hawk display, but found they could only view alert status and could not correlate information, drill down, or interact with other components. They also evaluated Uptime, but found it too limited as it was only capable of monitoring the status of machines.

They ultimately chose SL Corporation's RTView™ for the following reasons:

Easy Integration
SL's RTView was able to integrate and interact with TIBCO Hawk and other underlying systems and applications to deliver a highly effective Application Performance Management (APM) solution for real-time visibility.

Single-Pane-of-Glass View of the Entire Business Infrastructure
RTView enabled Smart & Final to view all of their systems in a single dashboard, and then drill down to specific areas that may require more attention, making it easy to initiate cross-referenced views of operating systems, applications, databases and processes.

The Right Tools for the Right Teams
RTView made it possible for both IT and Operations teams to view their data each in the way they need to see it – with customized monitoring and alerting functions – enabling the teams to address issues more quickly and efficiently.
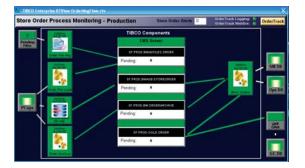
Solution

The solution combines both out-of-the-box and custom-developed adapters and displays for each of six cross-referenced views according to the following hierarchy:

- Overview of Systems and Applications
- Production and Development Environment Views
- Operating Systems, Databases, Applications, and EAI Processes

The Overview dashboard provides high-level, color-coded monitoring and alerts across the entire infrastructure.

The Operating System dashboard allows users to drill down to each machine. The Database Monitoring dashboards correlate machine-level and database status so the DBA can associate OS and database activities. They also provide alerts that link directly to Oracle Enterprise Manager for resolution, enabling operations to correct problems without involving the DBAs.

The Application Monitoring dashboards allow operations management to disable/enable Hawk rulebases, start/stop processes, and manage views based on role. The EAI Message Flow dashboard focuses on EMS messages, providing an end-to-end view of TIBCO components, enabling drill down to view BusinessWorks and adapter process components, and linking directly to custom-built message tracking.

Project Scope

The Smart & Final Enterprise Monitoring, Visualization, and Management Solution currently has 24 users across operations and IT staff, DBAs, and the help desk. The system monitors 17 databases (both Oracle and SQL Server), the four applications referenced above, 18 production and 11 development/test servers running on both AIX and Windows, and over 50 active process areas. The process areas enable grouping of information for distribution only to those for whom it is relevant.

The TIBCO environment is monitored in its own domain, and the other applications in their own domains, with all domains combined in the higher-level views.

Results

The most important benefits realized by Smart & Final to-date are a significant reduction in downtime incidents related to their GOLD supply chain management system – the lifeblood of the company's operations – and much faster recovery time should any outage or degradation in the environment take place.

Translating into business benefits, this RTView-based APM solution has streamlined the supply chain process by keeping GOLD up-and-running, minimizing both direct revenue loss and costs related to lost productivity. Smart & Final has also realized increased productivity of their operations and IT teams as more efficient and targeted alerts ensure the right people are involved to address issues more quickly.

The technical objectives were also achieved. Smart & Final can now monitor their systems in real time. They have one consolidated view across all required machines, applications, data sources and processes via multiple cross-referenced dashboards. They have streamlined operations by putting commands and resolution tools at the team's fingertips. And they have implemented their solution in a way that is easy to extend when new monitoring and visualization requirements are identified.

About SL Corporation

Over the past 24 years, SL Corporation has become the most knowledgeable and responsive provider of real-time monitoring, analytics, and visibility solutions. SL's flagship product, RTView, addresses a broad spectrum of enterprise visibility challenges spanning application performance management (APM), business activity monitoring (BAM), and component-level infrastructure monitoring. RTView has also become the de facto standard for extending the visualization of complex event processing (CEP) engines, TIBCO messaging middleware, Oracle Coherence data grids, and custom applications. SL's exclusive focus on real-time visibility solutions, commitment to customer success, and partner-centric culture are why thousands of industry leaders have chosen to work with SL to support their most critical applications and businesses. SL Corporation can be reached at +1 415-927-8400 or on the web at www.sl.com.