SOFTWARE AS A SERVICE CHALLENGES: BUILDING YOUR ROADMAP TO SUCCESS
Software as a Service (SaaS) is rapidly changing the IT landscape. Applications and processes that have traditionally been on-premises are now becoming externalized, provided by third parties via the cloud. While this ultimately brings many benefits in terms of cost, space and efficiency, transitioning to this new reality can be tumultuous for IT management. This expert FAQ guide discusses how to tackle many daunting SaaS challenges for IT management and provides insight into optimal SaaS monitoring.
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In this FAQ guide, expert Henry Svendblad tackles the many daunting Software as a Service challenges for IT management. Read on for insight into SaaS monitoring, IT service delivery management, making sure you have the right tools in your arsenal and how to plot a roadmap forward to an everything-as-service environment.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT CHALLENGES BROUGHT ON BY THE NEW SHIFT TO SOFTWARE AS A SERVICE?

Organizations are increasingly adopting externalized services such as Software as Service (SaaS), Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) and Platform as a Service (PaaS). But this rapidly shifting paradigm brings many critical challenges, including integrating, monitoring and managing all these different services.

Seventy-four percent of organizations today are now using some form of Software as Service (SaaS). Seventeen percent of organizations are using Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS), and Platform as a Service (PaaS) is also on the
rise. This is driving an increased desire to integrate these different services, and the challenge that this brings is both the performance and the visibility of all of these services now spread across physical boundaries.

Traditionally, IT departments were organized either by location or by the technology they supported (mainframe team, database team and so on). Now, users can be anywhere and services can be anywhere, so when there’s a problem, it’s typically with one of the services being delivered. And the challenge is who notices this problem? How do you notify someone of a problem that’s occurring? What are the tools that can be brought to bear to figure out where these problems lie? And then how many teams in how many different locations need to be brought in to solve some of these challenges?

The other thing that no one cares about anymore is that a server is down. Traditional network management control tools are focused on endpoint management, where they tell you that a device or server is down, but they don’t tell you that a service is being affected. Most IT departments have a number of point solutions that are focused on this endpoint management. But users only care about the service. They don’t care about all the different components that it takes to deliver that service.
WHAT DO ORGANIZATIONS NEED IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE EFFICIENT, WORRY-FREE SAAS MONITORING?

One of the biggest Software as a Service challenges is that service delivery is expected in real-time, while being distributed across many different locations. And on top of that, much of the technology within these disparate locations is now virtualized.

So how can IT effectively look across all of these locations and into these virtual software constructs?

The challenge of Software-as-a-Service monitoring is that service delivery is now expected on a real-time basis. It can be distributed across many physical locations. And, within these locations, much of the technology is now virtualized. Servers have been virtualized, desktops have been virtualized, and all of these services are being combined together and delivered across a new range of devices, such as tablets and smartphones and thin client devices.

So what IT really needs for efficient, reliable SaaS monitoring is a single network monitoring tool that can look across all of these disparate physical locations and look into these virtual software constructs, but no single tool really exists. So a set of integrated or modular tools that fit together, or maybe a smaller set of somewhat integrated tools, would be an improvement. But,
unfortunately, what we get today is just a number of point solutions that look at solving different parts of this puzzle and are typically not very well integrated and require a lot of human intervention and physical eyes looking at different screens to try to put information together to effectively monitor IT services.

As SaaS proliferates, we’ll need to figure out a way to achieve what I call “IT Nirvana.” That is where services and expectations are clearly defined, where management of these services is proactive, not reactive, and is done with a single-pane view, rather than looking across a number of disparate systems in different locations and being done in a reactive way. We’ll need an enumeration of all the costs that it takes to deliver that service and, in some cases, taken a step further, actually charge that to the business to deliver that service, so that all of the costs for IT are tracked and assigned to services being delivered to the business. We’ll need to understand the business impact or the cost of services being unavailable to the business, or the value that it delivers to the business. And, of course, security. As we deliver services across physical locations, the expectation for security grows day by day.

WHAT IS THE FIRST STEP ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO TAKE IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THEIR IT SERVICE DELIVERY MANAGEMENT?
In order to get a handle on managing service delivery, you’ll need to rank all of your business applications and business services by cost, criticality to your business and the impact on your business in the event that those applications fail. Putting this comprehensive list together is no picnic, and there may be competing interests vying for top billing.

The first step in comprehensive IT service delivery management is what I call Fearless Management Inventory. What that means is to really understand all of the assets or configuration items that IT manages. This could be a server, a router, a switch, or any type of IT device that is brought to bear to deliver a service needs to be catalogued, defined and put into a database as a configuration item.

One of the most important things you’ll need to do is rank all of your business applications and, more importantly, business services, by criticality to the business. One of the challenges of doing this is obviously that the marketing department may believe that their marketing application is the most critical to the business, while the accounting team will tell you that their accounting application is the most critical to the business, etc. And so the challenge is coming up with that comprehensive list of applications and services and then having a broad range of business leaders help rank those applications and the cost and
business impact of those applications not being available.

And finally, you need an inventory of all of your different management tools and a true understanding of their capabilities. What makes this difficult for a lot of organizations is that their tools are sometimes spread across different physical locations and, in some cases, managed by different teams within IT. So what’s really needed is a comprehensive understanding of the library of tools that are available and how those capabilities can be brought to bear to solve the challenge.

HOW DO ORGANIZATIONS ENSURE THEY HAVE THE PROPER IT MONITORING TOOLS TO JUGGLE SO MANY NEW EXTERNALIZED SERVICES?

Your existing IT monitoring tools will likely not be sufficient for SaaS. So you need to determine the requirements for the IT monitoring tools you need to ensure acceptable end-to-end service delivery and optimization. This includes:

- Proactively managing every component that makes up a service;
- Understanding how that service runs optimally;
- Making sure that service’s expectations are being met; and
- Understanding the cost of delivering that service to the business.
Among all of the tools that you have to manage your endpoints, is there one tool that can bring that service capability and service management together in a single console? Or, if there isn’t a single tool, are there standards that can bring some of these various tools together? Or, if you have a service with many different components, are there different IT monitoring tools that cover different aspects of the services? You may end up with too many tools that cover too many different aspects of the service, making it unwieldy to manage. And there could also be critical components to the delivery of that service that are not covered by any existing IT monitoring tools. This is even more prevalent as you start to think about some of the services that are externalized to the organization, such as Software-as-a-Service or Platform-as-a-Service. The existing tools that IT traditionally uses might not have the ability to provide the type of management and monitoring and proactive capability that you need.

So you need to build a roadmap that defines the requirements for the IT monitoring tools that you need to ensure end-to-end service delivery and optimization. This includes proactively managing every component that makes up a service, understanding how that service runs optimally, making sure that service’s expectations are being met in terms of being delivered to the business and understanding the cost of delivering that service to the business.
You’re not going to have all of the tools you need or the one tool that you need to monitor these services effectively end-to-end, so you need to create a roadmap for how either new tools or existing tools will be brought together to provide that end-to-end service delivery. You also need to understand the processes that are required to ensure that you can deliver on that roadmap. That may include things like proper change control, proper management of your IT assets through a database and having the right security steps to ensure that there is security across all these physical boundaries. And finally, you need a way to provide automation and self-service to your user community, so that services can be requested by users and provisioned without the need for an IT employee to hit a button or create an account.
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