Harnessing the Power of an Enterprise IT Dashboard:

Three Essential Reasons Why Your IT Operation Needs One.

Read on to discover the three key reasons how enterprise IT dashboards can deliver highly valuable information to your organization in an easy to use format, and learn the importance of implementing simple processes that will turn dashboard data into *actionable* IT decisions.

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As the number of servers and applications grow, IT managers must find a way to convert performance system data into effective business intelligence.

IT management is faced with the daunting task of quickly turning complex data into accurate, actionable information, which in turn generates informed decisions that support the organization's overall business strategy. At the same time, IT management is responsible for ensuring high availability and performance of mission critical applications, while continually working to communicate the value of the IT department to the organization

Enterprise IT dashboards are integrated views that collect and communicate key data in a simple to understand way. They measure and manage IT services and performance to help executives and managers make informed decisions that support the strategic objectives of their organizations. A solid IT dashboard will effectively handle all the day-to-day needs for availability and performance yet still provide the high level views and reporting needed in today's leading organizations.

The Real World Challenges

Each day, IT managers are faced with the formidable task of effectively managing and optimizing a diverse and complex IT infrastructure environment. They are under great pressure to deliver high performance and high availability of business-critical applications, from e-mail to Web to on-demand applications – all essential to business competence.

The challenge is further exacerbated by systems performance data that is becoming increasingly unmanageable. As the number of servers and applications grow, IT managers must find a way to convert metrics on server

performance and IT service (application) availability into effective business intelligence that drives good IT decisions and accountability.

"In an era of hyper-connected businesses, few enterprises will meet their strategic objectives without integrating business and IT strategic decision making."

- Gartner

The reality is that IT services are becoming more closely linked to overall business objectives. High performance and 24/7 availability are essential to delivering on and supporting business goals. Transparent and easy to understand reporting is needed to provide clear results to the business units to back up the IT departments hard work. Without consistent and clear reporting that links to business metrics, even high performing IT departments have trouble showing their contributions to the business.

What IT managers need is a snapshot view of current, accurate, and well-organized systems performance, availability, and capacity data that gives them the clarity and insight to make the best possible business decisions quickly and effectively. Static data is no longer an option in technology today.

At the highest level, IT executives and managers face the challenge of finding a way to sync better decision-making with the objectives of the business units. IT Dashboards provide the key.

This alignment of visibility and accountability between the business and IT has been labeled "The Discomfort Zone" by Gartner. Gartner continues to drive home IT and business integration by saying, "in an era of hyper-connected businesses, few enterprises will meet their strategic objectives without integrating business and IT strategic decision making."

Meeting the Challenges: The IT Dashboard Aligns the Organization

The results are informed decisions that not only improve IT processes but impact the organization as a whole. The net result is fast problem resolution and happy end users.

One solution with great potential for meeting these challenges is the enterprise IT dashboard. Over the last several years, the dashboard has evolved as a replacement for traditional, static, pre-formatted reports. The key to their value as business tools lies in the real-time, web-based, actionable metrics that display in an intuitive, interactive, user-friendly GUI format.

Measuring and monitoring such factors as IT service health and application availability, server performance, and resource capacity, IT dashboards need to offer multiple hierarchical views, from performance and availability "snapshots" to detailed, drill-down metrics. Dashboards also need to provide alerts into performance and availability issues that enable quick response and resolution. In a single glance, an IT manager needs to gain key information about what is really going on across the enterprise (including all platforms like Windows, Linux, AIX, Solaris, HP/UX, Novell, VMware, etc.) to react immediately and decisively. The results are informed decisions that not only improve IT processes but impact the organization as a whole. The net result is fast problem resolution and happy end users.

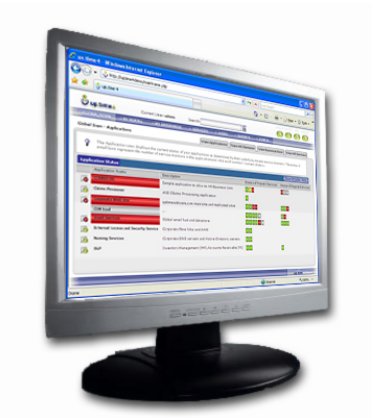
According to Gartner, providing the right information to the right people at the right time is essential. Part of the right information includes identifying the objectives and metrics through Gartner's simple methodology for action by making each metric "SMART:" **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ction-oriented, **R**elevant, and **T**imely.

IT managers can quickly identify "gaps" in availability and take appropriate proactive measures to ensure the objective or SLA is continually met or exceeded.

Three Critical Reasons Why Dashboards Are Essential in Today's IT Operation

Simply, the IT dashboard can deliver tremendous strategic value in three critical ways to the business, its customers, and its shareholders. These three areas are: assuring IT service/application availability; optimizing enterprise server capacity; and creating a proactive system health strategy.

1. Assuring IT Service/Application Availability



As IT becomes more and more user-facing, mission-critical applications and services cannot tolerate downtime. Continuous availability is simply the standard in IT management. To keep systems up and running, IT must have a clear, consolidated, big picture view of the enterprise. IT dashboards provide this real-time, service outage data and offer a fast, accurate, and comprehensible way to "see the whole picture," get to the root cause of an availability or resource problem, and help IT staff solve issues quickly.

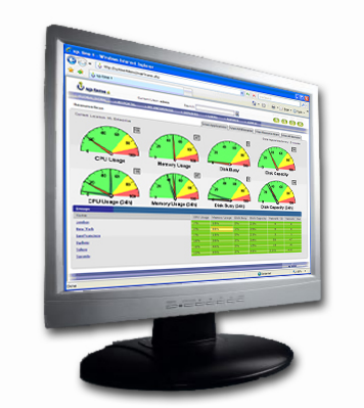
Example A: Performing a gap analysis, the dashboard quantifies actual historical and real-time performance for measurement against goals and Service Level Agreement metrics. This information clearly shows the IT executive and managers whether the availability is 97% versus the business objective level of 99%. With this information, IT managers can quickly identify "gaps" in availability and take appropriate proactive measures to ensure the objective or SLA is continually met or exceeded.

The IT dashboard can also serve to improve the perception of IT across the enterprise. The ability to provide critical information and reporting across the

business in a transparent and accountable manner will build trust and confidence. This, in turn, leads to an IT department that is highly valued by all the business units.

2. Optimizing Enterprise Server Capacity

The same dashboard can then monitor, alert, and report on the entire new virtual infrastructure with in-depth metrics.



IT management needs a way to quickly determine server capacity, and identify resource trends to make accurate capacity management decisions that will effect both uptime and future budget requirements. The IT dashboard should offer quick and intuitive views on critical enterprise server resources like CPU, Memory, I/O, and storage capacity on both a real-time and historical basis. Gone are the days of historical performance data being limited to last week or last month. Your dashboard should store complete historical performance data that spans many months and even years, allowing more accurate trending of capacity for better capacity oriented decisions.

This simplified enterprise view of capacity helps to identify trends and forecast infrastructure requirements – critical to evaluating future needs and justifying future resource budget requests.

Identify opportunities for server consolidation and virtualization.

The dashboard can also help with identifying opportunities for server consolidation and virtualization technology, in which physical servers can be consolidated in a virtual environment using VMware, for example. This can help reduce costs dramatically and improve the management of existing

Change the organisation's perspective. Communicate IT as a unit that delivers business value.

resources. In some cases, a dashboard can actually identify and flag servers that are candidates for consolidation and virtualization, and then continue to watch over, monitor, and report on all the virtual instances once the consolidation is complete.

Example B: An IT manager in a large investment bank is considering consolidating onto VMware, but needs to know which of the hundreds of servers are really candidates for virtualization? With one simple report, the dashboard locates and flags all servers across the entire infrastructure that are prime candidates for consolidating. This report saves hundreds of hours of manual work to isolate potential servers. The same dashboard can then monitor, alert, and report on the entire new virtual infrastructure with in-depth metrics.

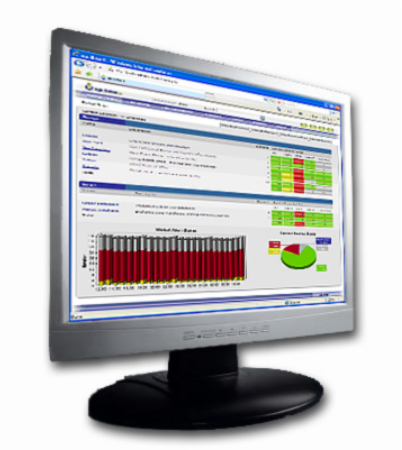
Example C: Consider how a large insurance company's IT manager might need to report on the number claims per hour to help determine its impact on capacity. With a fully functional IT dashboard, analyzing current and historical systems data with trending graphs makes capacity decisions more accurate. Moving forward, maintaining on-going communication on this issue with the business units (with either service level agreements or IT departmental objectives) is as simple as scheduling automated reports and graphs that can be sent daily, weekly, or monthly.

Example D: In a global Telecommunication company's call centre, the business issue is handling a certain volume of calls per minute. There are concerns about the infrastructure handling these demands and, at the same time, increased corporate pressure to go "Green" to save energy and costs. The IT dashboard allows the IT manager to be proactive by viewing historical and current data on the systems that affect the call center's ability to handle call

volume. The IT manager is then empowered to make recommendations about potential infrastructure upgrades or consolidations where necessary to save the department money and energy costs while ensuring high levels of availability. Add-in automated monthly availability/IT Service reports that are automatically sent to the Call Center Manager and Executive team, and you can see how IT starts to be seen as a business value contributor and not just a cost center.

Create a highly valued IT department that is seen as much more than a cost center.

3. Creating a Proactive System Health Strategy



As is the case with human healthcare, prevention and early problem detection can save time, money, and pain. A proactive system health strategy empowers IT to drive decisions based on a proactive, rather than reactive, model. The IT dashboard provides the information needed to implement this type of strategy. IT managers can get instant overviews of lower-level outages and how they impact higher level business functionality. This quick and easy-to-find information gives managers the insight to prevent serious outages now and in the future.

The dashboard views also allow base-lining an IT infrastructure -- an important first step in being able to identify out-of-scope behavior in order to take action to prevent future problems.

Example E: An IT manager in a bank uses the dashboard to quickly identify a failed server in a branch, and determine what caused the server to go down. Armed with this information, the manager easily views similar servers in multiple branches across the company to understand if other servers might be in a similar predicament. This alone can help save hundreds of thousands of dollars in IT outages each year and help avoid a major failure that can result in lost revenue, lost credibility, and lost customers.

"Using an IT performance dashboard to take the business results that the dashboard presents and turn the data into action makes the difference between being successful and failing."
- Gartner

Example F: A Web-based retail operation is experiencing slow response times. The dashboard helps the IT manager quickly pinpoint and rectify the problem in minutes before it escalates into a major outage.

In All Cases: IT Dashboards = Strategic Decisions

In all three areas, the enterprise IT dashboard makes it possible for CIOs, Directors of IT, IT managers, and IT staff to have a real-time, accurate, global overview of the enterprise, understand problems and opportunities, and react immediately. It enables IT managers to budget smarter, plan resources more effectively, and make more intelligent decisions about long-term IT planning.

From Dashboard Data to Actionable Business Decisions

To leverage the valuable dashboard information, the enterprise should have policies to ensure that insights gained from the dashboard lead to actionable measures and, ultimately, improved IT availability and performance.

To put such processes in place, the IT manager might use the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) framework of best practices for delivering high-quality IT services. These vendor-neutral management procedures provide support in achieving quality and value and guidance on IT infrastructure, development, and operations.

The next step would be Control Objectives for Information and related Technology (COBIT), which provides managers with measures and processes

to maximize the benefits of the processes and developing appropriate IT governance and control in the company.

Used strategically, dashboards can underscore the business value of IT, define a proactive environment, manage IT risk and change, and identify opportunities for continuous improvement. The key is to develop a way to communicate these results both vertically and horizontally across the organization, and map your critical focal areas with overall business objectives. This strategy creates a highly valued IT department that is seen as much more than a cost center.

In the end, you should find an IT dashboard that satisfies the needs outlined above in a simple and easy to use manner. Be careful not to waste money on heavy frameworks and expensive consultants. Find a dashboard that can be run by your staff and one that provides all the views and systems that both the IT end users and the IT executives need to drive IT value to the organization without sinking the budget.

According to Gartner, "Using an IT performance dashboard to take the business results that the dashboard presents and turn the data into action makes the difference between being successful and failing." (from "Using an IT Performance Dashboard," December 2004)

Summary

Demand for high performance and high availability of business-critical applications is fast becoming a cornerstone of business competence. Properly used, an enterprise IT dashboard can effectively track and communicate IT service availability, server performance, and infrastructure capacity at both a high, strategic level and a granular level, providing a mechanism for clarity, insight, and better decision making on important IT-driven business issues.

The key reasons IT dashboards are essential in your IT operation are: the assurance of IT service/application availability, optimal enterprise server capacity, and the benefits of a proactive system health strategy. In these key areas, dashboards can be highly effective in turning complex data into accurate, actionable information that helps IT management make informed decisions quickly and proactively, manage IT change, ensure high availability, and support continuous improvement and strategic objectives across the enterprise.

About uptime software

"After easily deploying up.time to over 125 servers, we are seeing an immediate and significant cost savings in licensing, and especially in consulting fees. In fact, time spent on monitoring and planning processes by consultants and internal resources has dropped dramatically. This year, we'll realize a 510% ROI from using up.time."

- **Wally Beddoe, Vice President of Technology, Telekurs Financial**

uptime software has been providing powerful, easy-to-use, and affordable server monitoring, IT service availability reporting, and capacity planning software, including IT performance dashboards that help organizations eliminate unnecessary IT outages, increase service availability, and reduce the costs of server management since 2000. uptime's solution is self-deployable with no consulting needed, and IT departments can start seeing real data in a few as 15 minutes. uptime also leads the industry in virtualization and consolidation monitoring and reporting, including the "Server Virtualization™" report that automatically identifies and flags opportunities for consolidation and virtualization across an entire infrastructure. uptime provides all this and more in one versatile software product called 'up.time 4'.

Come and see why uptime software is making waves in IT operations management with 'up.time 4,' enterprise IT performance, availability and capacity management software that just works. To learn more about IT performance dashboards or the 'up.time 4' solution, please contact phil.didaskalou@uptimesoftware.com or call 416-868-0152

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