# Delivering the right information to the right people at the right time

resolution

operations

ticket closure

business

mobility

**(x) matters**

# Contents

## Introduction

While many enterprises have made significant investments in network and systems management solutions and processes, there is still an opportunity for improved efficiency. We've seen the focus of IT and network operations shift from merely gathering massive amounts of data to targeting and delivering information to people who can act on it, no matter where they are.

Let's examine operational efficiencies that IT operations and network management departments can implement to respond more effectively to customers. We know that network and IT operations staff can be more productive and proactive, all while gaining agility from their teams and better visibility into their performance. But when this happens, the enterprise can see a lower mean time to resolve these issues and fewer incidents that affect the business.

## IT operations trends and challenges

Over the last several years, companies have spent a lot of time and effort deploying sophisticated network and systems management solutions. They've also spent money on standardizing their IT and network operations, with many using Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) processes. Some organizations have even integrated event data from systems and network management—including incident and change management—into the help desk. Unfortunately, this hasn't lifted the burden from IT operations, which still receive thousands of notifications each day. The challenge remains how to improve visibility into network and systems without bombarding IT operations staff with data.

While some organizations have deployed applications that automatically log, ticket, and classify events, in many organizations the network operations center (NOC) staff perform those tasks manually.

Manual dispatch from the NOC is still very common, which can lead to significant delays between when the NOC identifies an incident and when the right person is located and starts working on it.

Globalization has transformed the business environment, but it has made IT operations more challenging. With IT operations centers all over the world, dispatch, scheduling, and personnel management become incredibly complicated.

Because many employees are mobile and utilize smart phones and wireless networks, they can work from anywhere – around the corner in coffee shop or across the country in a meeting. Unfortunately, this convenience and increase in productivity has not found its way to most system and network management applications. Access remains console-based, so while IT operations employees may get an email notification of an event or incident, they are unable take action to correct it when they are away from their desk.



*(mobility)*
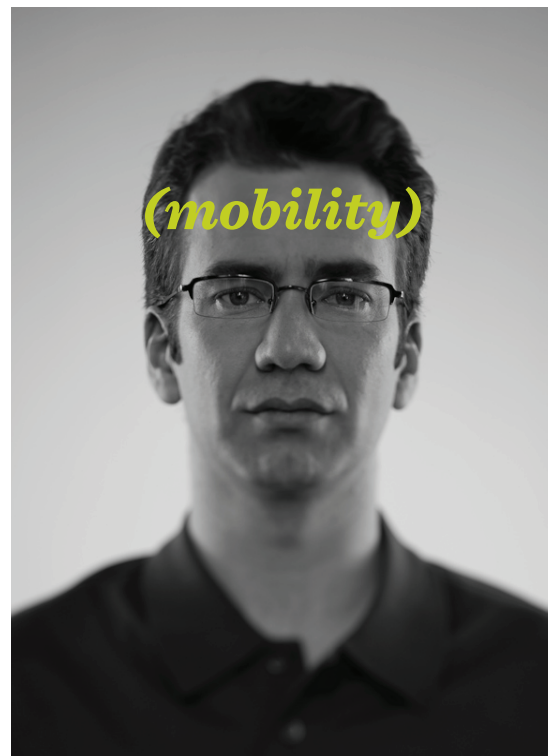
Just as convenience has not found its way into network management applications, automation has had a hard time finding its way into IT operations dispatch. The NOC often review alarms before classifying them as an incident and ticketing them, and organizations may or may not have an automated ticketing process.

## Optimizing IT operations and network management with a relevance engine

Because most processes are still manual, the NOC may dispatch incidents to the wrong person, or to someone who is temporarily out of the office and can't act upon it, resulting in duplication of effort or delays while tasks are reassigned. Establishing ownership and tracking accountability can be inconsistent.

IT departments must often create their own communication, assignment, and escalation processes. A relevance engine can help optimize IT operations in four major ways:

• Mass personalization ensures IT staff get notifications important to their job without the distraction of mass notifications, improving their productivity and blocking unwanted information

• Automating incident assignment and escalation provides accountability and reduces incident resolution times

• Extending IT and network management systems to mobile and handheld devices allows IT staff to start working on a problem remotely, reducing incident resolution times

• Automating certain IT service notifications to user groups or stakeholders reduces queries into the IT department, improving organizational effectiveness
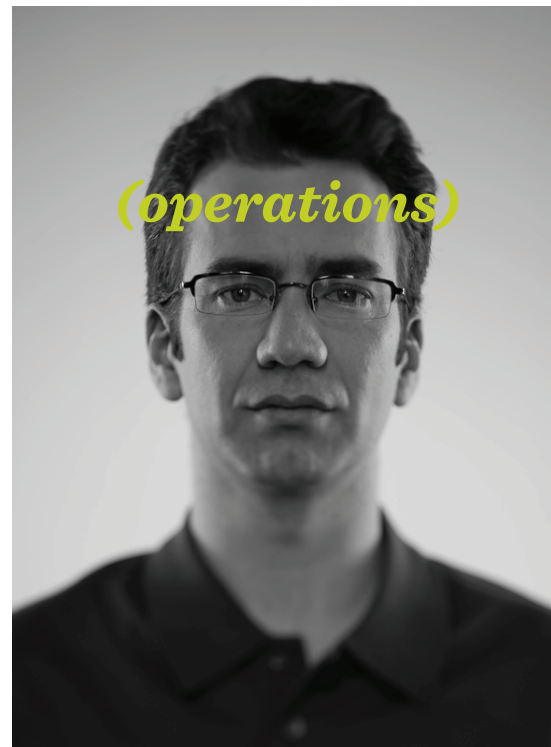
## What is a relevance engine?

A relevance engine is a capability that can be added to existing applications and technologies to connect people with relevant information, notifications, choices, and actions at exactly the right moment. Because relevance engines selectively deliver what matters to the appropriate people and give them the ability to take immediate action, they help businesses function more quickly, accurately, and intelligently.

## Mass personalization

From an IT perspective, one of the most attractive functions of a relevance engine is the ability to direct personalized information and alerts to the appropriate person, eliminating mass notifications and duplication of effort. In order to accomplish this, relevance engines gather data on users and processes, sending choices and information that are targeted and personal to each individual, blocking anything that is not needed or wanted.

Because users define their profiles, the relevance engine contains accurate and thorough contact information, skills, assignments, roles, responsibilities, areas of interest, preferred language, location and availability. This information allows the relevance engine to only deliver information that is relevant to that person and automatically escalate an issue when they are unavailable.



*(operations)*

# Automate incident assignment and escalation

Once a relevance engine has information on IT users, it can start effectively directing notifications and assigning incidents. Staff can dynamically update their profile based on their availability. If they are in a meeting, traveling, or busy on another critical problem, IT managers can customize these profiles based on any number of criteria.

For example, imagine a scenario where a SAP server in Denver goes down during a weekend snowstorm. The relevance engine will target an IT operations employee responsible for SAP near Denver that is available that weekend and has a four-wheel drive vehicle. If for some reason that person is unable to reach the office, the relevance engine will identify the next-best choice, while logging the change in responsibility and ownership.

*Extend IT and network operations applications to mobile and handheld devices*

Relevance engines deliver personalized information to mobile and handheld devices, allowing remote and mobile team members to not only receive alerts on their smart phones, but also to open a console and begin remediation. Extending IT and network management applications to remote devices improves business agility and reduces the mean time to incident resolution. If, for example, employees cannot reach the office due to a snowstorm, they may be able to resolve or reduce the severity of the incident remotely.

*Deployment scenarios leveraging relevance engines in IT operations*

Relevance engines are a proven, valuable solution for the enterprise help desk. But there are compelling benefits—improving visibility, agility, accountability, and time to resolution—to also link relevance engines to IT and network management systems and processes.

*Segregating event notification and delivery*

In this scenario, the relevance engine quickly and efficiently delivers events that may affect business operations directly to the support teams that are responsible for the service or application, while IT and network management departments receive non-critical alarms. This allows IT staff to take proactive measures, reducing the possibility of service impacts and improving overall business productivity. This strategy is best for companies with clearly defined and streamlined business processes.

*Example: xMatters (operations) engine allows IT operations to take proactive fault remediation*

A financial application's response time decreases slightly. Usually, this is a non-critical event fixed by IT operations. However, since it is the last week of the quarter and the slowdown is in the accounts receivable application, the xMatters *(operations)* engine automatically alerts the person responsible for delivering the service. They are offsite at a meeting all week and want to be notified of any actions by SMS. The SMS message from the relevance engine details the severity of the problem. Using their web-enabled smart phone, the team member can remotely access the appropriate management application console and immediately attempt to resolve the ticket. The xMatters *(operations)* engine tracks all the actions they take, so operations staff back at the office can follow the resolution process.

*Critical information delivery*

Similar to the first scenario, this plan can also segregate notifications based on a number of criteria, including type and severity, where a representative from each functional area related to the event receives notification of the event simultaneously. This "all hands on deck" approach aims to resolve business-impacting issues as quickly as possible. This strategy is best for organizations where critical events can be extremely time-sensitive and costly.

An event affects a financial institution's ability to process transactions. Based on the alarms, the xMatters *(operations)* engine automatically phones the "on-call" representative from each of the functional teams involved, a dozen in all. The relevance engine dials the SAP support team member's BlackBerry or iPhone, since it is 6pm in New York, while it finds the server support team member at their desk in California. Each hears a recorded message that gives a synopsis of the problem and what preliminary attempts have been made to fix it. Next, the relevance engine informs each team member of the other members, and bridges them all into a twelve-way conference call that allows them to start collaborating immediately.

At the same time, the xMatters *(operations)* engine can update users on status and estimate the expected time to resolution, reducing the deluge of calls from users and allowing team members to focus. Once the situation is resolved (an intermittent network outage in the Data Center) the network support and Data Center team members continue to receive status updates, ensuring the problem does not recur. During the entire process, the xMatters *(operations)* engine updates all related systems, so operations managers can analyze their team's performance.

## Conclusion

While business process improvements have optimized IT and network management operations, the help desk is not the only area of the business that can benefit from a relevance engine. Providing targeted, personalized notifications to IT operations increases the visibility of systems without bombarding staff with unnecessary alerts and notifications. It establishes immediate ownership of issues, tracking them through to resolution, and creates a historical record so that teams can track their progress and efficiency. Most important, the increased visibility into

network and system events lowers risk, which means fewer incidents and a more productive business.

## xMatters improves business productivity and availability

The xMatters *(operations)* engine improves IT operations productivity by automating notification, assignment, collaboration, and resolution of IT incidents. The relevance engine puts an end to inefficient mass notifications by delivering relevant information from IT applications and systems to the individual who can best resolve the issue. It automatically and efficiently dispatches incidents, freeing IT operations from an inefficient, manual process. Finally, it provides system visibility to IT professionals, allowing them to be proactive, resolve incidents faster, and track their performance.

xMatters mobile access gives IT operations staff the ability to take action and resolve incidents in real time from a remote location. Users have access to their applications from any web-enabled mobile device, including BlackBerry and iPhone.
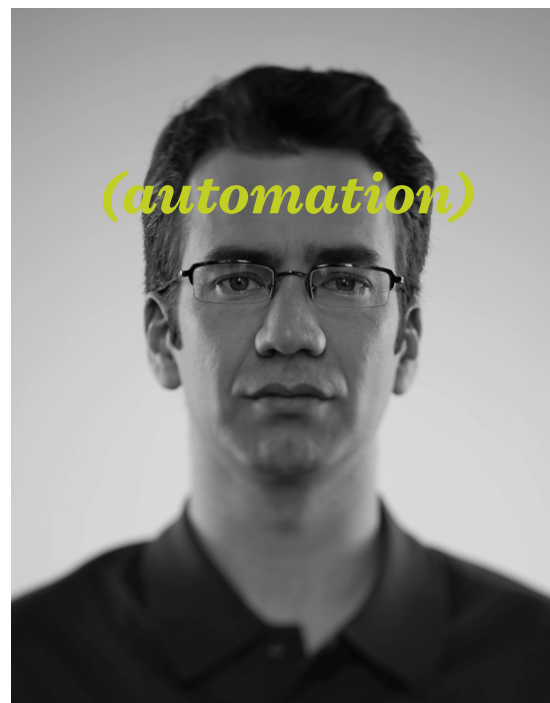
# About xMatters

## In with the new

If you knew us as AlarmPoint, you may be wondering what changed. The short answer is: we're still doing what we did before; only now we're helping entire organizations become more aware and responsive. We still offer the same quality solutions you've come to expect, like alert management products, but we've realized that what businesses need most is relevance: a way to connect people with what matters to them, at exactly the right moment. A relevance engine completes the last mile of IT service delivery and makes businesses more effective, more agile, and more competitive. Right now.

## xMatters

xMatters builds relevance engines that connect people with what they need to know at exactly the right moment — so they can take immediate action. Our relevance engines work with existing enterprise applications, technologies, and processes to help businesses run faster and smarter. Over 800 global firms use xMatters to make their products and services more valuable, both internally and to their customers and shareholders. Founded in 2000 as AlarmPoint Systems, xMatters is head-quartered in Pleasanton, CA with European operations based in Woking, U.K. and Asia Pacific operations based in Sydney, Australia. More information is available at www.xmatters.com or call 1 877 XMATTRS, +44 (0) 1483 722 001 UK.