

Interactive Data Uses TeamQuest to Stay One Step Ahead of Performance Constraints

Case Study

TeamQuest specializes in IT Service Optimization

Client Info at a Glance

Company: Interactive Data Corporation

Industry: Financial



Team Accomplishes More



CAPACITY MODELING

TeamQuest Model (now a part of TeamQuest Predictor) **ensures** that less expensive disaster recovery systems are adequate to handle current workloads.



ANSWERS QUESTIONS

TeamQuest analysis allows IDC to quickly **zero in** on the exact problems, isolate the bottlenecks and determine the proper corrective action.



MANAGE CAPACITY

TeamQuest's trend reporting features keep management informed regarding **cyclical patterns** in capacity and performance.

Interactive Data Uses TeamQuest to Stay One Step Ahead of Performance Constraints

Interactive Data Pricing and Reference Data, a division of Interactive Data Corp., uses TeamQuest Performance Software to monitor system performance across the enterprise, to generate Web-based performance reports, and to be certain that systems will provide adequate capacity in the future. In short, it uses TeamQuest software to ensure its many customers always have excellent performance for their hosted financial applications.

Interactive Data Pricing and Reference Data provides global securities pricing, evaluations and reference data designed to support financial institutions' and investment funds' pricing activities, securities operations, research, and portfolio management.

The company collects, edits, maintains, and delivers data on more than 6 million securities, including daily evaluations for approximately 2.5 million fixed income and international equity issues. Interactive Data Pricing and Reference Data specializes in "hard-to-value" information and evaluates many hard-to-value instruments. At the core of this business are its extensive database expertise and technology resources. Data is delivered via direct feeds, a variety of Web-based tools, or is accessed via third party software. Clients include leading banks, brokerage firms, insurance companies, money management firms, government agencies, stock exchanges, trading houses, custodians and fund managers worldwide.

To support such a far reaching network of sites and clients, Interactive Data operates a large number of servers, primarily UNIX (Solaris, AIX and HP-UX), though more recently Linux systems as well. These servers are used by the company to host databases and other applications for its many customers.

“Our typical customer [has] Web-based tools or PC based applications that make use of our applications,” said Steve Amichetti, manager of VM Systems at Interactive Data.

Several years ago, the company relied on basic UNIX tools such as vmstat, top and other freeware to record basic statistics of system performance.

“Once you get beyond a small number of servers, the free tools just don’t allow you to monitor UNIX well enough for capacity issues,” said Steve. “While these tools have value, they didn’t allow us to monitor or analyze a large number of systems effectively.”

As a consequence, he felt his organization was being too reactive in responding to changing traffic patterns and in predicting peaks in demand. As server sprawl caught hold internally, he realized he could do a much better job of capacity management. He looked around for a way to be able to proactively monitor his systems with regard to capacity issues.

Interactive Data began using TeamQuest software in 2002 following a comprehensive review of a wide range of available management tools.

“We looked at half a dozen products but found that TeamQuest could do it all when it came to capacity planning and performance management,” said Amichetti. “After a successful proof of concept we decided to purchase the product and began to introduce it to our systems gradually.”

Six years later, TeamQuest is now on all of the production systems at Interactive Data, most of the preproduction machines and some systems in development.

“Ideally, we would have TeamQuest on all development systems as we should know the complete performance profiles before we put a new application into production,” said Amichetti.

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TeamQuest in Action

“TeamQuest is a complete toolset that enables us to really dig in to find out what’s going on,” said Amichetti. “We can compare good days against bad days in order to zero in on the exact problems, isolate the bottlenecks and determine the proper corrective action.”

Steve describes TeamQuest View, a tool that comes bundled with TeamQuest IT Service Analyzer, as his bread and butter. He uses it daily to monitor the environment and analyze potential issues with databases and applications.

Amichetti gives an example concerning a clustered system. A system administrator noticed that one server within the cluster system had “failed.” He contacted Amichetti to help isolate the source of the problem.

“I asked him for the time period it happened and then brought up TeamQuest View to see what was going on,” said Amichetti.

He quickly looked at various statistics for that server such as CPU utilization and I/O. TeamQuest software can slice and dice performance information to show how business-relevant “workloads” are consuming data center resources. Steve noticed an especially high jump in the number of processes started for a specific Interactive Data workload. Steve then used TeamQuest View’s process drilldown capabilities to quickly pinpoint a specific userid that was initiating ten’s of thousands of processes that caused the cluster node slowdown and ultimate “failover.” With this information, this user was interviewed to find out why he was spawning thousands of processes per minute. According to Amichetti, he might have had to spend days of trial and error trying to solve this without TeamQuest software. Using TeamQuest View however, it took just minutes.

“vmstat and top wouldn’t have caught this problem; we needed TeamQuest View to be able to look at the processes running,” said

“TeamQuest showed us in minutes what was causing the problem. We immediately tracked down the guilty party and took care of it.”

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While TeamQuest View is used mostly for troubleshooting, Interactive Data takes advantage of many other TeamQuest applications. IT Service Reporter, for example, is used to provide basic performance statistics to IT staff over the Web. This lets these personnel keep an eye on things and gives them what they need to know without having to contact Amichetti to find out what is going on.

Data is published in the form of daily reports showing key statistical charts for all production machines. Once a week, a second set of reports is generated showing the most recent peak periods on the various systems. Peaks are tracked in order to determine developing trends. This lets managers observe which days are busier than others, and what cyclical patterns are emerging. Once set up, such reports are generated automatically.

“People used to always have to come to me for the data and that was a real bottleneck,” said Amichetti. “Now that they have access to IT Service Reporter, it saves me a whole lot of time. More importantly, it saves time for others as they don’t have to wait for me to tell them what’s happening.”

Interactive Data has also begun to use TeamQuest Model to look into the future and see how its systems will stand up to forecasted levels of growth or unexpected traffic spikes. For instance, a production machine has a backup machine in a disaster recovery site which doesn’t quite have the same horsepower. TeamQuest Model is used to ensure that in the case of a disaster, the disaster recovery machine will be able to take over the entire workload without experiencing delays.

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