

## Rolling Review Wrap-Up: APM Suites

### All Good APM Things...

We wrap up our largest Rolling Review to date with an overview of 9 application performance management suites.

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There's a lot of marketing hype and money swirling around next-generation application performance management tools. While many IT organizations strive for deep visibility into critical application metrics, they're fearful of products that depend on manual, labor-intensive approaches to deploy, manage and monitor applications—and for good reason. To find out which APM suites provide insight without too much outlay of effort we've spent much of the past year testing nine leading products in our Windward Consulting Real-World partner labs.

We designed a thesis around holistic APM products that not only identify problems, but take corrective action to resolve performance issues before they impact users and customers. Actions may include allocating additional bandwidth or server processing capacity, even rolling back configuration changes. Where corrective-action capabilities are lacking, organizations will struggle with fixing problems manually, though fast identification and notification are better than nothing.

We also suggested that for truly holistic APM, products should locate and predict performance problems across all application components and support all facets of the app infrastructure, including system and network performance. Service modeling was another key area; we sought to model critical application services and report on SLA compliance.

A tall order, but there are dozens of players in this space. We tested suites from BMC, Compuware, Indicative, NetIQ, NetQoS, Network General, Nimsoft, Quest Software and Symantec. During the review, we had an additional twenty-three vendors that wanted to participate, while a handful, including CA, IBM and HP, declined our invitation or could not get software in place to meet our schedule. We'll try to get more APM products in the lab this year, but we're confident the nine suites tested represent the full spectrum of features in terms of data collection, reporting, correlation and integration.

### Getting the Goods

All APM products need application data. We tested suites that use proprietary agents, existing system agents, network packet capture, synthetic transactions and adapters that pull data from other sources. Many draw on a combination of mechanisms to capture data and aggregate it into meaningful information.

While synthetic transactions can detect issues and packet-capture tools can pinpoint the applications at fault, only agents can dig in and determine the specific root cause of a performance problem. To accomplish this, application agents and correlation are required. We found that products employing synthetic transactions did a good job discovering performance issues, but alone, they're unable to determine the cause. While network packet capture helps determine if an app is sucking up excessive network bandwidth and causing performance issues, we found these products best suited for troubleshooting more tactical issues thanks to their network engineering approach to applications.

The leaders in our tests relied on application agents in combination with network packet and synthetic transaction data. While at times cumbersome, agents simply provide the best visibility into issues at the application level.

Bottom line, there is no one-size-fits-all APM tool. Organizations that need flexibility and scale should expect to invest in substantial configuration and ongoing maintenance. Point products will provide value, but may fall short for those seeking end-to-end insight. No product tested pushed the envelope in terms of proactive corrective actions to resolve performance problems. While many can integrate with other run book automation tools, we would like to see more native capability. Only then can an APM suite itself holistic.

## Best of the Best

In terms of SLA management for APM, Nimsoft's Nimbus was a real leader. Its flexible and robust SLA reporting engine allowed us to manually build application service-level agreements by coordinating groups of monitored components into a comprehensive service view. We could report SLA performance granularly, for example, during defined business hours and excluding particular time slots, such as maintenance windows. Nimbus also let us exclude a particular component, during a specified time range, within a group of elements that operate under an SLA. This level of detail is helpful when IT must exclude an application component that failed because of a customer-generated outage that falls outside its SLA. This happens all too frequently, yet many APM tools are unable to manage this scenario.

Products focused primarily on collecting network packet information, including Network General (now NetScout) and NetQoS, are best suited for troubleshooting performance issues within the network. These appliances allowed us to drill down and get very discrete packet-level performance data and work to determine the nature of problems. However, dashboards and executive views were not the best—we typically needed to integrate into other appliances for this capability, not a seamless process.

One product that handily made our Shortlist is NetIQ AppManager. Although it relies on agents and, as with all rivals, service models needed to be constructed manually, NetIQ did a great job depicting end-to-end application transactions. Its 'la cart pricing will also be extremely attractive for organizations. In the same class, we also liked Quest Foglight's balance of data collection and features. Foglight dashboards can be created easily and set to model high-level business and service views that clearly identify issues as they occur. All that data does come with a price in terms of complexity; Foglight is not as plug-and-play as some of the other tools reviewed.

If you need a synthetic transaction product to monitor Web services, go with Indicative. Its top-down business-service allows organizations to monitor and manage performance as a true service. Indicative does not require IT to manually correlate data in order to build service views; just drag and drop field-component templates into a logical service grouping. As a bonus, you can be up and running in an afternoon, and maintenance was a breeze. For large enterprises that want scalability and flexibility and don't mind some complexity, Compuware deserves a hard look.

This is the most complete system we reviewed in terms of data collection. One ServerManager can support as many as 1,000 agents, and you may add multiple ServerManagers, then access and report on all of them in the VantageView console. We didn't test the scalability of this three-tier agent, controller and console architecture, however, we did validate that it can be distributed across machines. Only HP/Mercury and CA/Wily—neither of which agreed to be reviewed—have comparable diversity in ways to collect data. Given the cost and complexity of these applications, however, they're not for the faint of heart.

If you already have BMC tools or other supported data collection utilities and are looking to correlate information and make some intelligence out of your data, BMC ProActiveNet is a slam dunk. ProactiveNet is strongest in intelligent correlation of events, invaluable for organizations with SLAs. Its agents are effective at pulling extensive metrics from applications and application infrastructure components. This was the only tool tested that focused on correlation of data in contrast to data collection.