



Case study: Nimsoft deployment at SoftLayer

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Recently, Tier 1 Research had a chance to sit down with representatives from both **Nimsoft** (now a part of CA Technologies) and **SoftLayer**, and learn a bit more about the implementation of Nimsoft's suite of offerings within the SoftLayer environment.

In the initial days of Nimsoft's development, its strategy was to focus on developing the core of a monitoring service, focusing on APIs and SDKs first with the assumption that many of its future potential customers might have already had an enterprise-class NMS in place (such as **Hewlett-Packard's** OpenView, **IBM Netcool**, etc.), which it would feed into. This forced the firm to focus on functionality first over looks or interfaces, but eventually made Nimsoft a good fit for SoftLayer's tendency toward automation and in-house development capabilities.

SoftLayer CTO Nathan Day stated that the company had always wanted to give its customers the intelligence they need to monitor their own servers. Previously, it had looked at the popular open-source package Nagios, but there weren't any agent-based intelligence gathering components that met SoftLayer's needs and scalability requirements (before the merger with **The Planet**, SoftLayer had roughly 30,000 servers). Therefore, SoftLayer was looking for a mostly 'self-managed' product with an agent component that could easily be deployed, wouldn't affect the customer's host(s) too much, was truly multi-tenant and could scale to its projected needs.

Upon meeting up initially with Nimsoft, one of the first questions that SoftLayer asked was about the APIs (something it reportedly asks of any software or hardware vendor, so vendors reading this take note!) Initially, it was impressed by the capabilities that the API afforded, and after just a few weeks of kicking around the Nimsoft service in-house, SoftLayer realized that Nimsoft would help it meet its goal for their customers. For the deployment, SoftLayer negotiated an opex licensing model for the on-premises version of its software, as opposed to using Nimsoft On Demand, or buying a fixed number of licenses ahead of actually having systems to monitor.

SoftLayer was able to quickly complete the engineering work needed to integrate Nimsoft into its automated provisioning systems as a standard offering. Now, when a customer installs a SoftLayer server, the Nimsoft agent is automatically installed at the same time the

OS is provisioned and the initial login credentials are turned over to the customer. Customers can opt out of this installation if they prefer, otherwise they get the Nimsoft agent installed by default. Existing SoftLayer customers that already had provisioned systems can sign up for the service via a portal (although they must install the agent on their own, since they would have the login credentials to their system).

Once installed, SoftLayer provides a free base package of stats across the primary categories of CPU, disk and RAM. Advanced packages and plug-ins are available for other monitoring needs, such as when running complex applications like Microsoft Exchange or **Oracle**. Everything in the customer's experience is done from the SoftLayer portal, which communicates with the Nimsoft system and its agents spread out throughout the servers in its datacenters. The product has already proven itself to be popular not just with SoftLayer's customers, but with their internal NOC as well. The NOC operators benefit from the Nimsoft installation on the customer's server by using data collected as a diagnostic tool to help troubleshoot customer help desk tickets; i.e., spotting high memory utilization and massive paging activity as the cause for a 'slow' server (as reported by a customer) is much easier when all of the relevant data has already been collected and is available for review.

T1R take

For vendors, the way to a service provider's heart is threefold – true multi-tenancy, APIs and consumption-based pricing. The tendency of service providers to start asking their vendors to offer opex pricing is a trend we've commented on in the past, and don't see any signs of this changing in the future as providers try to align their cost structures closer to their revenue flows.

As cloud gains more and more mindshare in the market, end customers are becoming accustomed to the 'pay only for what you use' model – so much so that it is now starting to extend beyond technical infrastructure components and into managed services as well. T1R expects that the vendors that will succeed the most in the cloud era are the ones that recognize these trends and work with service providers to come to a licensing and deployment model that is mutually beneficial, even if there is some shared risk involved.

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