



Dec. 18, 2009
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Virtualize the "Big Dogs" in 2010

What do Virtualization and Cloud executives think about 2010? Find out in this VMBlog.com series exclusive.

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Most large enterprises have already virtualized their "low hanging fruit" - the non-business critical applications. Well, apparently, there was less low-hanging fruit than we all thought. According to Gartner, Inc., virtualization is not currently as widespread as many presume. The company recently released research that reports only 16 percent of workloads are running in virtual machines today. (Gartner News Release: <http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=1211813>)

In 2010, IT organizations will remain under tremendous pressure to continue to deliver the hard dollar ROI and operational agility benefits that come from virtualizing servers. The IT leaders that I talk to are actually quite keen to virtualize their Tier One applications. But in many enterprises, these Tier One applications (the ERP applications, the CRM applications) are owned and supported by dedicated application teams that have historically had a great deal of influence and control over the environment that the applications run in. These decision-makers are concerned that business-critical applications could suffer stability, performance or quality problems in this more dynamic, volatile operating environment. And these teams -- the folks whose necks are on the line to deliver to the business -- are rightly asking some really tough questions.

Most importantly, they are asking, "If we agree to let you virtualize our application, how are you going to guarantee us that the performance of our key transactions is not going to degrade?"

To resolve this deadlock between the application team, the application owners, and the IT operations group, there has to be some mechanism to measure the response time of key transactions within the application before the application is virtualized, and then to continue to measure them as various layers of the application are progressively moved from physical to virtual servers or migrated to the cloud.

And so it seems that virtualization is having an interesting impact on the discipline of Application Performance Management (APM). For six years or so, vendors have been flogging "end-user experience" as the next generation of APM tools. The intellectual 'best practice' is to monitor the real end-user experience for all end-users, all transactions, all the time. The deployed "best practice" has fallen far short of the vision. But virtualization is increasing the uptake velocity of end-user experience monitoring. Measuring end-to-end response times -- as experienced by the end-user -- is the only known

way to ensure application performance is commensurate with business needs after the back-end infrastructure has been virtualized.

If you're evaluating end-user experience monitoring to accelerate or support your virtualization initiative, here are some capabilities you are going to want to look for:

- **Dynamic Benchmarking**, which enables the IT organization to compare system performance prior to the change with system performance before and after each change in the back-end infrastructure. Dynamic Benchmarking is available for all system performance metrics including transaction response times, system errors and utilization.
- **Comprehensive Threshold Alerting**, which allows IT organizations to create and manage alerts based upon established Service Level Agreements (SLA). Alerts can be delivered via email or integrated into existing performance management consoles to provide the IT team with a "single pane of glass" for performance management.
- **Dynamic Base-lining**, which allows the IT organization to monitor when any performance metric (response time, quality or utilization) varies from short or long-term trends. Dynamic base-lining directly attacks the difficult issue of ensuring minimal performance degradation for the thousands of transactions for which meaningful SLA thresholds have not yet been set.
- **Advance Root Cause Analysis**, which allows the IT Operations team to evaluate the impact of end-user behavior and desktop resources and conditions on any performance anomaly.

End-user monitoring solutions are designed to mitigate the inherent risk to business continuity that any disruption to the back-end infrastructure raises. End-user monitoring provides unified visibility and one version of the truth, offering the risk mitigation that can accelerate the deployment and benefits realization of a virtualization initiative.

So start monitoring end-user experience of your key enterprise apps - and start running with the big dogs!

About the Author

Lori Wizdo, vice president with Knoa Software, a leading provider of end-user experience management solutions, has worked in the enterprise software industry since 1979. She has worked at a diverse set of technology firms, ranging from start-ups to such global corporations as Unisys, NCR and BMC.