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## **How Managing Applications Is Like Managing a Baseball Team** **By Lori Wizzo, Vice President, Knoa Software**

We're three months into the Major League Baseball season and the Philadelphia Phillies have the best record in baseball. The Houston Astros have the worst. Even an average fan knows the home team's league standing. And any fan who owns a team-branded article of clothing can report the home run tally of the team's slugger and the ERA of the pitching staff.

The sport of baseball is replete with metrics on its KPIs (key performance indicators). Some stats date back a century, which is the context for one oft-quoted declaration by catching great and legend of the malapropism, Yogi Berra: "I knew the record would stand until it was broken."

IT organizations can learn a valuable lesson from Major League Baseball. IT should publish its "application management box score." For every critical transaction or process, IT should be able to report the AVR (average response time), the AAR (aggregate adoption rate) and the RTQA (run time quality average).

Such clear, undisputed metrics would provide a 'lingua franca' on the level of service being delivered for critical business applications -- which is fundamental for IT/Business alignment. Of course that is the goal driving the estimated \$26 billion invested in IT Management tools each year.

But, if you ask the average business stakeholder if the IT service levels are improving steadily, year over year, you are not likely to see a lot of smiles and nodding heads. IT Execs could benefit from the wisdom of Yogi Berra as to how their money is being spent.

### **Theory and Practice -- the Importance of Real Metrics**

Yogi reportedly once said, "In theory there is no difference between theory and practice. In practice there is." There is a takeaway message for IT execs in this statement. Far too many of the application management tools, which are still broadly deployed in IT shops today, are based on simulations of reality or rely on proxies for real metrics.

For example, consider the first generation of application performance monitoring tools -- still the predominant tools in use today. The seminal approach to measuring application performance is to measure the resources used by the application, and the processing times, at each of the tier of the back-end infrastructure. The theory is that if the execution of the application was not causing

a resource constraint at the database server, or the network server, or the application server (e.g., IBM CICS, J2EE, or .NET), then the application must be performing well.

In practice, this monitoring approach often results in the condition where "all systems are green" on the back-end but the business constituency is complaining that the application is slow or non-responsive. So how do you fix the end-user's perceived issue in a situation like this?

That lack of visibility into the real user experience of critical business applications led to the first generation of end-user experience monitoring tools - synthetic transaction engines. These tools leverage transaction scripts -- which represent how end-users would, in theory, execute a transaction -- to execute key application functionality on a desktop in the end-user environment (e.g. a bank branch office, a remote manufacturing site).

The response time measured in the simulated transaction is taken as a proxy for end-user experience. In theory, that might be a good idea. In practice, where end-users display any number of unscript-able behaviors, reality is often quite different than the simulated transaction.

Both of these problems highlight why measuring application performance as experienced by real end-users, using real applications, executing real transactions is the better practice. That is part of the reason why, according to a major analyst firm "end-user experience monitoring lies at the center of most Global 2000 enterprise buying decisions."

### **Beyond Metrics to Meaning**

When Yogi Berra was a manager, despite having access to the rich repository of baseball KPI metrics, he cryptically, and wisely, quipped, "You can observe a lot by watching."

While IT strives to put the next generation of performance monitoring and management solutions into place, it is also important to remember it's not all about metrics — you can learn a lot by watching.

It is not possible to rule out the impact of end-user behavior on both the performance of the application and the perception of the user experience. Any application performance monitoring tool that does not analyze end-user behavior will not provide the intelligence required to both manage IT service levels and support the end-users.

However, even more significant is the insight into how end-users are actually using the application software tools. The value of technology is not in the technology itself - even if that technology is performing properly. The value comes when employees successfully leverage these expensive IT tools to execute business processes.

To provide a true measure of business service, IT decision makers need to know how the technology is used on a daily basis: are employees using the tools that are provided; are they using the right transactions for their role; are they using them efficiently - or is a security or compliance train wreck waiting to happen?

This need for comprehensive end-user intelligence is transforming the IT application management market. According to one analyst firm, "end-users will increasingly favor vendors that can move beyond experience monitoring into behavior monitoring."

### **Do You Have a Plan?**

It's the people, the end-users, who make IT valuable. The only way to truly understand if your IT investment is producing ROI is to monitor the end-user usage of those applications. It is time for IT to have the visibility necessary to make the proper decisions to make the best of an enterprise IT infrastructure.

This visibility that will also help IT decision-makers accurately justify IT expenditures at every level of the organization.

Major League Baseball teams recognized a long time ago that you can have the best players on your roster, but unless you monitor their health and performance, you aren't optimizing the performance of the team.

Do you have a plan to optimize the performance of your team? After all, as Yogi said, "If you don't know where you're going, you might not get there."