MAAF Gains Real-Time Monitoring of Critical Application Performance and Availability with Axway WideVision

Using Axway WideVision Service Health Check, this large insurance company transformed the monitoring of its information systems and greatly improved its efficiency. Application availability and performance are monitored in real time from both user and geographic perspectives, with alerts and decision-making support that mitigate the impacts of incidents.

THE CHALLENGE

Based in Niort, France, MAAF Assurances is a large French insurance company with more than four million clients and members and over 7,000 employees across the country. To ensure the proper management of its activity (20,000 documents scanned every day, 80,000 emails exchanged externally, 33,000 customers calls), the company is equipped with significant IT resources. More than 1,000 servers (IBM Z, UNIX and Windows) and 10,000 workstations on 600 sites (agencies, offices, management centers) are connected in real time to the central system.

At the IT Production department, 160 staff are directly assigned to users service and project implementation. “Our Monitoring and Supervision Team ensure the daily availability, security and performance of our information systems, in accordance with service level agreements,” explained Pascal Brosseron, Head of Production Division at MAAF’s Department of Information Systems. This mission includes three main objectives: ensure the quality of service provided to users, contribute to project success, and improve IT processes and efficiency.

With 40 critical applications in use daily from 5:00 a.m. to 1:30 a.m. that represent the core business of MAAF’s Information Systems team, and operational websites running non-stop, MAAF’s Production teams must continuously monitor all processes performed within the group (more than 12,000 per night and 40,000 per weekend). But the availability of all applications must be ensured as well. “The best IT incidents are those which do not happen or do not disturb our users,” said Pascal Brosseron.

This approach, both proactive and very reactive, was validated by ISO 9001 certification in 2002 and acted as a trigger to launch an initial supervision project which began in March 2003. In 2011, the Department of Information Systems wanted to go further by implementing Axway WideVision Service Health Check, which defines indicators based on business services performance criteria and enables real-time monitoring.

CHOOSING THE SOLUTION

"The primary mission of supervision at MAAF is to alert! It’s not to monitor components," said Gilles Membrard, Supervision Manager at MAAF. The selected tool must be able to alert the Production teams in case of trouble, but also to provide diagnostic and analysis support. "With Axway WideVision Service Health Check, we can ensure a functional supervision, meaning we can monitor application availability to users and measure performance from end-to-end."

The product also provides technical supervision by controlling connecting channels and flows and by monitoring infrastructure, networks and phone service.

MAAF Assurances at a glance:

- **Activity:** Founded in 1950, MAAF Assurances is a large French insurance company and the main subsidy of Covéa, leader in goods and responsibility insurance
- **2011 Key Figures**
  - 4 million members and clients
  - 4,165 billion euros of turnover
  - 106 million euros of IT budget
- **Headcount:**
  - 7,084 employees in 579 agencies and 36 centers in France
- **Objective:**
  - Optimize IT and business services with a tool capable of monitoring in real time the availability and performance of the company’s critical applications
  - Ensure the measurement and monitoring of application performance from end-to-end
- **Solution selected:**
  - Axway WideVision Service Health Check
When we talk about BAM (Business Activity Monitoring), it generally refers to operational monitoring of functional departments’ business activities. Indeed, BAM allows Operations to control business processes efficiency by monitoring real-time key performance indicators, those that reflect the achievement of operational objectives. But the same technology also offers the ability to manage IT operations.

At MAAF, the IT environment features impressive volumes and the need to ensure the best service quality to users, partners and customers, 24/7. Efficient, real-time supervision of all technical and application infrastructures is required. MAAF has extensive experience in monitoring its IT with Axway, and went further with WideVision Service Health Check, which provides a very visual and instantaneous monitoring of the entire infrastructure’s performance. At a glance, IT supervisors can monitor the performance of the entire information system.

The benefits gained with this tool are conclusive: increased reliability and efficiency of supervision, improved productivity of operators, and greater responsiveness to incidents, as well as improved communication with users based on factual and objective information.

With WideVision, MAAF gained a professional and proactive monitoring of its IT environment.

The data collected are used to generate important availability analysis reports to make the right decisions.

The tool also has other advantages. “It offers diverse, efficient and controllable acquisition means. Processing can be performed in parallel and distributed across multiple servers,” said Gilles Membrard. This is essential to meet MAAF’s needs to continuously monitor the availability of 40 critical applications (250 functional tests every 10 minutes), control the performance of 10 critical applications (8 million performance-related data processed every day and up to 600 per second during peak periods) and test 5,000 technical components every 10 minutes, with a minimum of 50 tests performed simultaneously.

THE PROJECT

In order to ensure efficient and continuous supervision, MAAF opted for simple rules. A robot regularly executes a script to monitor the availability of applications and technical components. The result is compared to the expected result. And a correlation engine monitors results and feeds relevant indicators to trigger alerts if an action is required.

To measure performance, MAAF uses a query on all applications that starts a timer whenever a user submits a request. “The data is then recovered and analyzed in WideVision with value axes that provide continuous monitoring of business services status and user visibility in real time,” noted Gilles Membrard. To master the tools and ensure success for the long term, a center of excellence was created with three people who became supervision experts.

MAIN RESULTS

Using Axway WideVision Service Health Check, MAAF transformed the monitoring of its information systems and greatly improved its efficiency. The tool’s engine offers real-time correlation of all transactions performed from each workstation, across all 600 company sites, to analyze the actual performance of the information systems.

Thus, at any given time, the supervision team is able to know which user in an agency encounters a problem, the duration of the problem, its evolution, the impacted applications and side effects. “The tool can handle a large amount of information with great flexibility and offers a wide variety of choice of output.” A map of France with green or red icons shows at a glance the performance of the group’s 600 sites. A gauge measures and displays in real time the regularity and quality of performance of each service. “The product informs us immediately if a service or activity is at risk or if there is a slowdown in transactions. A workstation is thus considered slow when an action takes more than one second,” said Gilles Membrard.

The root-cause analysis function and related data (components availability, response time, data volume) help quickly locate the origin of a problem and address it in a focused way. “With supervision, we can really set priority for actions.” The tool further improved communication with users. “Having accurate performance information provides reassurance but also helps us gain the trust of users,” said Gilles Membrard. “The ROI is easy to prove, you just have to realize the cost of a minute of downtime on our site!” he concluded.

Report by Christiène Brancier