

## TIPS FROM THE TRENCHES

# Building the Business Case for Network Management and Monitoring Software

It's no secret that companies are being careful about their investments these days. IT budgets are tight, and network engineers need to show a strong case for ROI before securing a technology budget.

Given today's various mandatory regulations and protocols, stretched IT staffs, and complex, dynamic, virtualized network environments, network management and monitoring software is an essential business tool to ensure optimal performance.

Companies of different sizes across all industries are implementing network management and monitoring software and, as a result, experiencing strong ROI, amazing data analysis and reporting, and related benefits like consolidated hardware usage, reduced man-hours and reliable network up-time. Even in an environment of financial prudence, organizations are finding a strong business case for investing in network management and monitoring software today. It's no secret that companies are being careful about their investments these days. IT budgets are tight, and network engineers need to show a strong case for ROI before securing a technology budget.

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## Successfully Presenting Your Case for Implementation to Decision-makers

For many IT departments looking to implement network management and monitoring software, getting financial buy-off is more than half the battle. Mike Williams and his team were able to navigate this process easily by using a few best practices:

- **Determine who the decision-makers are at your company and tailor your approach to them.**
- **Realize that all of these individuals might not be technical, so you will need to present your plan and the related benefits in terms they understand.**
- **In addition to explaining how the deployment will positively impact the company, mention how it might make a difference for each individual directly.**
- **Take a look at the types of charts and documents that the decision-makers use for reporting in their jobs and mimic them when presenting the case for network monitoring software.**
- **Try to predict what their points of resistance might be and how you can address those. Deliver tangible results/numbers and present them with a simple solution to a problem within the organization.**
- **Figure in maintenance and related costs when estimating your budget so no one is surprised. Maintenance can be up to 20 percent of the purchase price. Additionally, scope professional services and/or consulting fees in advance.**
- **Demonstrate clear ROI, particularly when it comes how the automation can save man hours.**
- **Let them know that you will make use of free tools, virtualized environments and anything else that can help save money along the way.**

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**CLIENT  
STATISTICS**

Financial vertical

Increased infrastructure  
size 100%Saved 20% in equipment  
replacement costs

20% server-consolidation

Saved \$130k over 2 years

Achieved 99.99% uptime

**Identifying the Need**

For Mike Williams, a senior network engineer at a California based financing company, his employer's success was creating quandaries for him and his team. The company he works for had experienced exponential growth, including an 80 percent increase in personnel and a 100 percent increase in infrastructure size. And, with advancements in clustering, virtualization and database consolidations, the company's infrastructure was also growing in complexity.

Due to the expansion, Williams' team was stretched thin, and their workload was only exacerbated when IT issues arose. "We were wasting our resources on reactive problem-resolution, when we should have been proactive instead," said Williams.

Williams' team was using non-integrated network monitoring tools and lacked network analysis capabilities. "Like 'The Lord of the Rings,' we needed 'one ring to rule them all,'" said Williams. He and his team set out to find a solution that would help them streamline network management and monitoring so they could anticipate potential issues and preempt them before they became tough to control.

**Evaluating the Solution**

Williams wanted to be thorough in his evaluation of network management and monitoring tools, so he selected a wide range of products to trial hands-on, ranging from software options to hardware solutions. He enlisted a balanced team of testers to help him find the solution best-suited to his organization. The team included network engineers, helpdesk workers, developers and end-users who could evaluate the potential solutions from different perspectives.

In planning the evaluation, Williams was sure to allocate the proper time and resources, ensuring that they could set aside time each day to devote to the testing to get as realistic as possible an experience with each potential solution. Williams added, "At first I thought we could complete the project in three weeks. I later realized that wasn't enough time to really get the full hands-on experience with each software, so we course-corrected. You need at least two weeks devoted to each potential solution to understand its full capabilities and get a feeling for its data monitoring and trend analysis abilities."

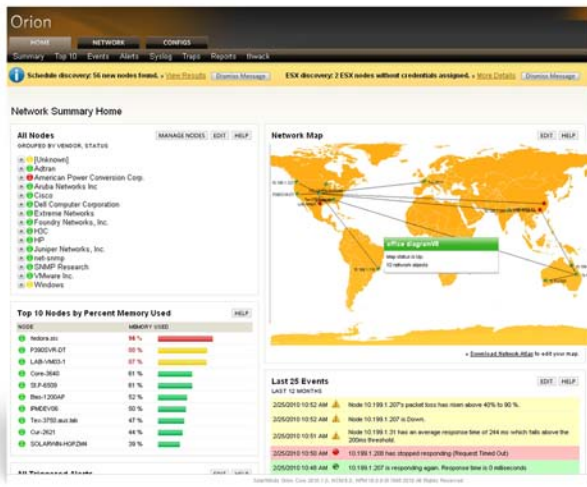
Before beginning the evaluation, Williams and his team pin-pointed success metrics so each solution could be measured consistently and objectively based on how well it met the company's needs. In this case, those metrics comprised man-hours/time spent per day, revenue generated, costs saved and SLA adjustments. "As we evaluated each offering, my team helped me create reports with charts and graphs so we could see the results clearly and measure the solutions against each other in a simple-to-understand, tangible manner," said Williams.

Williams' team also evaluated each solution based on a pre-determined list of must-have features. These capabilities were consolidated reporting for all users (including executives, finance, managers and end-users), a single user interface, a Web-based solution, ease of use and scalability.

Of course, budget was another key area of evaluation. "In addition to figuring the costs of each software alternative, we also figured the cost for other options like adding head-count to the IT team to manually handle network management and monitoring as well as the potential costs of network downtime that could result from not investing in software that could help us proactively ward off problems that could disable the network," explained Williams.

Understanding and preparing for the protocols, system requirements, bandwidth needs, timing and licensing models of each software candidate was also an important part of Williams' evaluation.

"Orion is budget-friendly and up-and-running quickly. There's no need for outside implementation help or professional services and consulting, which is of huge value to our company," said Williams. "Most importantly, the great support from SolarWinds' thwack community is priceless to my team."



## Orion Network Performance Monitor (NPM)

### Selecting the Best Match

After a more than thorough testing period, Williams and his team determined that SolarWinds' Orion Network Performance Monitor was the right choice for the company. "Orion is budget-friendly and up-and-running quickly. There's no need for outside implementation help or professional services and consulting, which is of huge value to our company," said Williams. "Most importantly, the great support from SolarWinds' thwack community is priceless to my team."

Once Williams and his team had selected Orion, the next hurdle was to get buy-off from the corporate decision-makers to approve the investment. To ease this step of the exercise, Williams determined who these decision-makers were and what their functions were within the company. This helped him anticipate the questions and concerns they would have with making the investment as well as how they were used to processing information. Williams was prepared with the facts necessary to dispel their concerns. He created reports and analysis in a familiar style for each person so they could easily understand the ROI. (See sidebar.)

### Reaping the Benefits

Orion Network Performance Monitor helped Williams and his team increase data capturing and reporting, offering easy business root cause/analysis company-wide. The solution provides them with systems performance insight and analysis of mission-critical business applications, which has resulted in a \$20K savings on equipment replacement costs over two years.

Orion's automated nature and ability to approach network issues proactively has saved the company \$50K in its overall IT budget in 2008 and \$80K in 2009. Rather than employing help desk employees, a system admin and a network engineer to manually monitor the network, the product can do the job of several individuals in mere minutes. This includes auto-updating network topology maps, automated network discovery features and real-time performance statistics.

The team has achieved business uptime of 99.99 percent annually by being able to proactively resolve issues.

The team has also consolidated 20 percent of its servers and cut the cost of its outbound data connections in half, thanks to instances of underutilization identified by Orion.

End-users have also experienced the benefits of Orion's data. For example, Williams' team was able to use the tool to pinpoint the reason why an executive admin's computer was working slowly (too many bandwidth-intensive applications running at once) and it was able to quickly and simply pull data for the company's CFO, reporting the cost and utilization of T1 lines within the business.

"Being able to show ROI like this has certainly made me popular with our corporate executives," said Williams. "And applying the tool to help individual users has elevated my team to 'IT Hero' status!"

Choosing a Network Management and Monitoring Solution that's Right for Your Company

It's clear that network management/monitoring software can provide tangible results for your company, not only helping to make your job easier, but also easing issues across the entire company.

By taking the time to properly evaluate your needs and the options available, you will be on your way to a successful implementation—and a new career as a Network Superhero!

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## IT Management Inspired by You.

SolarWinds (NYSE: SWI) provides powerful and affordable IT management software to more than 97,000 customers worldwide — from Fortune 500 enterprises to small businesses. We work to put our users first and remove the obstacles that have become “status quo” in traditional enterprise software. SolarWinds products are downloadable, easy to use and maintain, and provide the power, scale, and flexibility needed to address users’ management priorities. Our online user community, thwack, is a gathering-place where tens of thousands of IT pros solve problems, share technology, and participate in product development for all of SolarWinds’ products.

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3711 S. MoPac Expressway, Building Two, Austin, TX 78746  
T: 866.530.8100 | F: 512.682.9301

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