

NetScout services architecture incorporates both application and network management

Analyst: Steve Steinke

NetScout is extending its services architecture to include packet flow information from the network as well as business process information from applications. The end-to-end visibility these approaches facilitate should also make it possible to assess the user experience and drill down to find root causes of reduced performance. The architecture that NetScout developed is now known as the Unified Service Delivery Management framework. The first add-on module is nGenius Enterprise Intelligence, which is integrated with the nGenius Service Assurance Solution. NGenius Enterprise Intelligence is the first offering to make use of NetScout's Adaptive Session Intelligence technology.

The 451 take

NetScout has been building up to this organizational change for almost four years, ever since it acquired Network General (and with it, Fidelia) in September 2007. The topological positions of services (multiple units of applications that together perform a business process or transaction), networks (the hardware and software that support the creation of services by way of applications) and applications (the software that supports the creation of business processes via network services) represent the service model that reflects the enterprise's mission. Although it would no doubt be to NetScout's advantage to incorporate its acquired technology more rapidly, it appears that none of its rivals are quite as fast as NetScout in architectural advances or product integration.

NetScout's most recent efforts to marshal IT elements in the ultimate search for assuring an optimal user experience are based on what the company calls 'service delivery.' A service for NetScout can be an element of a business process, but it can also be a network, protocol or collection of applications. Business processes are typically implementations of application software, each of which contributes its functions to some or all of the tasks necessary for business. For example, a common business process is CRM, which makes use of such services as database queries, directory-based authentication, Web servers that respond to application requests and WAN links that provide performance and reliability over an end-to-end path.

Service delivery can be thought of as the topmost overall view or destination of IT resources, while business processes can be thought of as the topmost overall view of business activity. The nGenius Enterprise Intelligence module operates at the session level, making it possible to observe the interrelationships of application and service components. By exposing multiple domains in a consistent way, there can be improved staff collaboration and consolidation of scarce tools that might never have justified adoption on their own.

Traditional user experience can be monitored from the application point of view or from the network point of view, but neither view can capture complete visibility alone. In the next couple of months, NetScout will ship nGenius Enterprise Intelligence, supplementing nGenius Service Delivery Manager, which was released a year ago. These modules expose aggregate views of the performance of service elements and leverage the data from packet flows on the network. The new technology enabling the combined operation of these key information sources is called Adaptive Session Intelligence (ASI). ASI can provide a unified service-oriented view of a user session, and correlate latency hop by hop. Over time, ASI technology can learn to recognize applications and sessions, rapidly analyzing the business transactions they employ and providing a complete representation of the user session.

Competition

NetScout is in many respects the market leader for consolidated applications, services and networks, providing session-by-session analysis of every aspect of the user experience. **HP Software** concentrates on helpdesk modules and configuration management to provide its version of service management. It seems to us that HP doesn't really mean the same thing as NetScout when it refers to service management. **BMC Software** has focused for several years on 'business service management,' but its offerings resemble HP's more than NetScout's. **CA Technologies** and **IBM Tivoli** are also important competitors, but still reflect their roots in the mainframe and UNIX server world. A more recent market entrant is **SolarWinds**, which has grown by acquisition to resemble some of the configuration management providers. A player with similar ideas of combining application data with deep networking data is **Network Instruments**. **ExtraHop Networks'** system is not particularly concerned with the forensic role of capturing all traffic with a high level of assurance (for law enforcement or security practices, for example); instead, it is concerned with capturing key indicators of end-user satisfaction.

Reproduced by permission of The 451 Group; copyright 2011. This report was originally published within The 451 Group's Market Insight Service.

For additional information on The 451 Group or to apply for trial access, go to:
www.the451group.com