



EMC Insurance Companies Assures Optimal User Experience

End-to-end visibility assures business service continuity and user experience across a geographically-dispersed network

Overview

Region

Americas, Des Moines, Iowa

Business Challenge

EMC was looking for a scalable solution to extend network visibility from the main campus and two data centers to 16 branch offices and five service centers in a cost- and resource-effective manner. EMC also needed to assure high-quality service performance and optimal responsiveness to end users while keeping pace with new service roll outs and new technologies.

NetScout Solution

nGenius® solution is comprised of:

- InfiniStream® appliances
- nGenius Integrated Agent for Cisco® Integrated Services Router

Business Value

- Improved predictability of responsiveness, enabling immediate access to business-critical information to compete more effectively
- Improved service delivery by rapidly identifying performance issues and minimizing the downtime of business applications
- Assure the performance of critical applications including email, VoIP, video conferencing, and business transaction processing



Customer Profile

EMC Insurance Companies is one of the 60 largest property and casualty insurance companies in the United States and has been serving policyholders and independent insurance agents for 100 years. Headquartered in Des Moines, Iowa, EMC employs more than 2,100 employees and has assets exceeding \$3 billion. EMC sells its products solely through independent insurance agencies in more than 40 states. The company believes that a tight partnership with its agents is essential to delivering a superior level of personalized service to its policyholders.

A strength that sets EMC apart from other insurance companies is their decentralized operating structure that enables them to provide localized service from their 16 regional branch offices and five regional service centers. This unique office structure positions EMC employees in close proximity to its policyholders and agents, enabling its representatives to fine-tune strategies, products and pricing to meet the needs of individual territories and agents with tailored underwriting, marketing, claims, and loss control services.

Business Challenge

EMC runs its IT operations from two distributed data centers in Iowa and provides services to their employees and network of independent agents from these high-availability centers. The company's core networked business services include insurance policy transaction processing, claims processing, image processing, email, Voice over IP (VoIP), video conferencing and Internet. Most of the claims and transaction processing applications are programmed in-house using Unisys' Business Information Server (BIS) programming language and database. These business-critical applications run primarily on two Unisys mainframes where the bulk of EMC's business-critical information is processed and stored. Web servers provide the front-end interface between the independent agents and policyholders, and the mainframes.

The company leverages a nationwide MPLS-based WAN network to enable service delivery between remote offices and the data centers. For EMC, branch service delivery performance has been of high concern for many years. To meet the volume of transactions driven by policyholder growth, EMC initially deployed fractional T1 lines to all their branch offices, but as the company rolled out VoIP services and new product offerings, they needed to increase their links to full-speed T1s to keep up with growing demand and resulting traffic volumes.

“Slow application performance directly impacts our bottom line,” stated Ron Zoss, Assistant Vice President, Technical Support/ Operations Manager. “Our employees and agents expect quick response times from our applications in order to provide important information for existing and potential customers. As a result, the reliable service delivery of these business applications is an important component in customer satisfaction and engaging new policyholders.”

NetScout Solution

EMC became a NetScout customer in 2009, initially deploying the nGenius solution with two InfiniStream appliances which fed into an nGenius analysis console to help better identify reasons for network slowdowns at remote sites. Since their initial implementation, EMC has leveraged additional value and uses for the nGenius solution. In addition to response time analysis, the nGenius solution also helps them to identify emerging performance issues, expedite problem resolution, and better optimize their delivery of critical services.

“Due to the ‘bursty’ nature of traffic at our remote offices, employees in our branch locations often call to say ‘the network is slow,’ said Zoss. “The nGenius solution helps us to quickly determine whether there is an actual problem and, if so, the nature, cause, and location of the issue. Having all this information readily available allows us to not only resolve issues faster, but to protect service delivery by preventing them from recurring in the future.”

EMC experienced an unexpected increase in complaints from branch office employees about the responsiveness of a new application. The IT operations team is challenged in identifying the source of performance issues and cannot pinpoint the exact cause of degradations being experienced by end users. They need to determine if the issue is being caused by the WAN, the application, or the servers. In order to gain better visibility into application service delivery in the branch offices, EMC Insurance is deploying the nGenius Integrated Agent for Cisco® Integrated Services Router (ISR).

“Our objective with the nGenius Integrated Agent is to get visibility into end-to-end service delivery and application performance across the WAN. We need very accurate application performance information from the users’ perspective,” stated Zoss. “NetScout has provided us a solution that we expect will allow us to assess performance to provide the entire IT organization actionable information to better protect service delivery going forward.”

The company found the NetScout approach to be very cost-effective because they are able to leverage their existing investments in Cisco ISRs. “Cost is always a concern when it comes to IT investments,” said Zoss. “It was easy to cost justify the software-based approach. If we had to purchase hardware-based probes for each office, we’d probably only be able to cover one or two offices. We would then have to shift these appliances around as we investigated performance issues.” Because EMC already had Cisco ISRs at each office, the nGenius Integrated Agent software was easily installed into an open services slot using a Cisco ISR Services module. “Installation was easy and relatively inexpensive – it was an easy decision,” said Zoss.

Business Value

EMC now has end-to-end visibility of their service delivery environment including insight into all applications being delivered to its branch offices. Having this detailed network and application performance information enables EMC to assure its staff can meet customer expectations by being as responsive as possible. This enables the company and its agents to provide policyholders with immediate access to carrier information, create policy quotes quickly, and initiate and follow claims and billing inquiries. The biggest benefit the nGenius solution provides to EMC is the ability to optimize and tune the network for more predictable and acceptable response times. “We no longer need to spend hours tracking down the root cause of an issue, because the information we need is now right here at our fingertips,” said Zoss.

NetScout Equipment Deployed	nGenius solution with InfiniStream appliances and nGenius Integrated Agent for Cisco ISR.
Cisco Equipment Deployed	Cisco 3825 ISR; Cisco Application eXtension Platform; NME service modules.
Network Scope	InfiniStream appliances is deployed in two data centers. The nGenius Integrated Agents are deployed in the branch offices.
Users	The network supports more than 2,100 employees, plus hundreds of independent insurance agents.

Table 1: Network Snapshot.



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