Why Automated Monitoring is Key to Successful IT Operations Management

Automation is at the heart of modern IT operations. It offers the tantalizing prospect of driving value by freeing up stretched IT teams, reducing human error and associated costs, and improving the customer experience. But modern IT systems are also beset with complexity, and mistakes in automation can make things a whole lot worse. This is where IT monitoring comes in: working hand-in-hand with automation to provide the visibility and control organizations need to optimize their IT operations.

To reap the biggest rewards from automated IT monitoring, CIOs need to look for unified tools designed to cut through complexity and cultural silos. Otherwise they'll only add to the noise and do nothing to support the modern digital enterprise.

Tackling complexity

IT teams are in danger of being submerged by the workload of maintaining day-to-day operations, just as the business ramps up its demands for supporting newer digital growth platforms. Some 83% of enterprise workloads are predicted to be in the cloud by 2020, alongside 5.8 billion enterprise IoT endpoints according to Gartner. This is just the tip of the iceberg as far as digital transformation is concerned, with the global market predicted to be worth over $145bn by 2025. Behind the headlines, it's IT operations teams that have to make these new investments actually work, which usually means integration with complex heterogeneous systems.

Considering this growing complexity and the growing volumes of data, endpoints and the importance of applications and hybrid cloud operations, IT teams have a weighty task on their hands – not only to manage a successful transition, but keep the lights on and not let anything slip simultaneously.
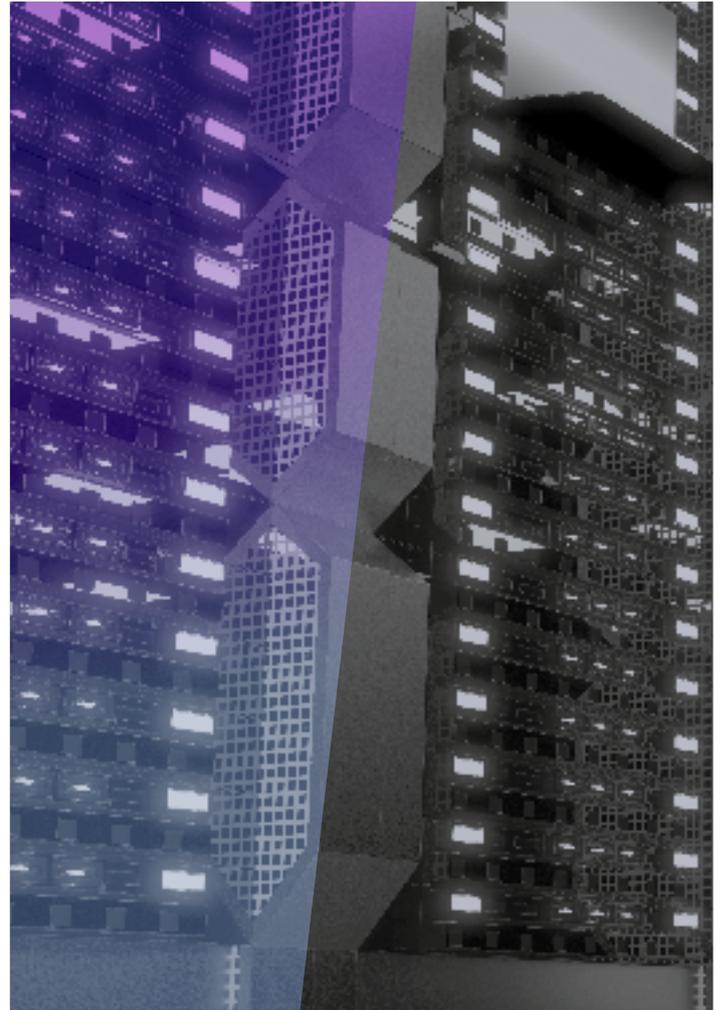
In this context, automation is a boon: helping IT teams hand repetitive, labor-intensive processes across to machines. On paper, this reduces the risk of human error — driving labor and cost savings, improving the efficiency of IT processes and reducing MTTR — and frees highly skilled staff to work on more strategic tasks.

Mistakes will happen

However, automation in itself is not necessarily the desired end goal for organizations. If it's used to automate the wrong processes, for example, the organization will derive limited value. Even worse, automate failing processes and you could end up amplifying the negative impact they have on the organization. Unplanned downtime is taking a growing toll on modern businesses. One US study claims a typical data center outage could cost US firms in excess of $740,000.

Scalability is another challenge: automating processes is all very well but if they don't work company-wide it could slow down the speed of business. Similarly, automation implemented without a governance and measurement framework around it will do nothing to drive improved accountability and visibility into systems.

Enhancing automation

However, when teamed up with IT performance monitoring, automation comes into its own, helping organizations to act fast to detect, remediate and alert when something goes wrong. There are two types of automation in this context. Problem automation kicks in when something unscheduled happens, according to a pre-defined set of criteria. It could lead to one of several automated actions, from the generation of a service desk ticket, to an alert sent to an engineer, and remediation such as restarting the affected service.

Operational monitoring, on the other hand, is automation that occurs without any specific event or outage occurring. IT monitoring tools can be set up so that when a new server comes online it automatically registers itself with the system, for example. Automated reporting and network audits/backups can drive further visibility, reduce operational costs and enhance control for IT operations staff.
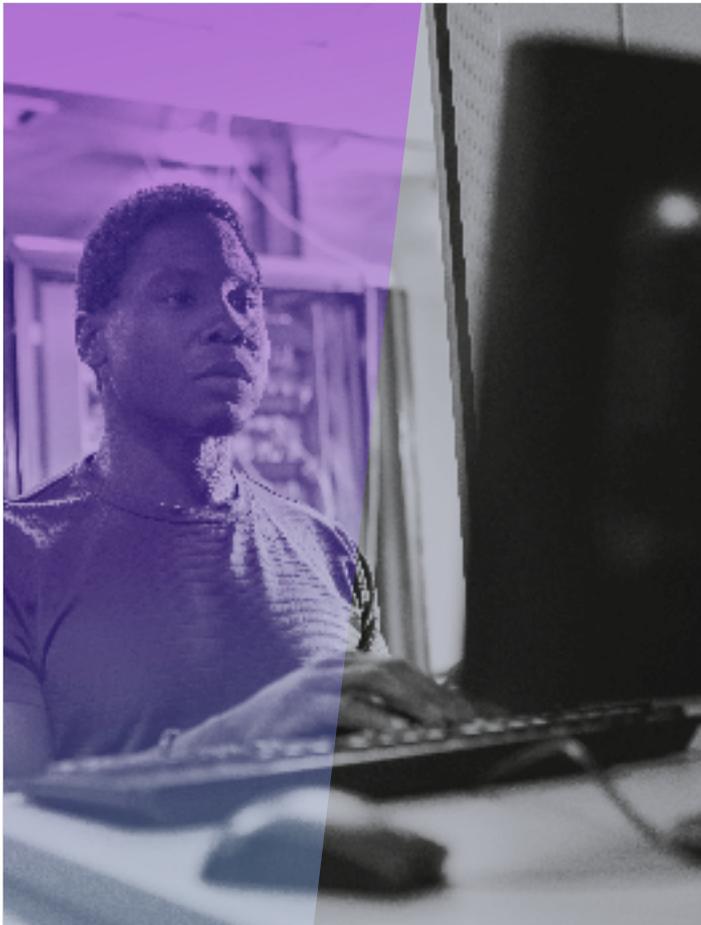
The quest for unified IT Operations Management

Such systems cannot work in isolation. They must be able to provide insight into the entire IT environment, which means everything from legacy on-premises equipment to modern digital systems. And in many cases, they will also need to be integrated into third-party systems such as notification platforms, issue-management tools, operations workflow management platforms, collaboration systems and more.

Organizations must also consolidate onto a single platform which offers a unified view of their environment. Tool sprawl is endemic in this space, thanks to the numerous monitoring tools that have often been brought in over the years to provide insight into new IT platforms. The extra complexity this generates only adds more licensing, maintenance and training costs while perpetuating existing IT silos and poor decision making.

Yet with automation and IT monitoring working side-by-side in a unified platform, IT teams can finally begin to realize the benefits of true IT operations management. This means reducing outages by spotting and fixing problems quicker, thus protecting the brand and enhancing the customer experience. It means having clear insight into which systems and services are adding most value to the business, thus enhancing IT's reputation in the organization as a value driver. And it means being able to use prized in-house IT skills in a more strategic way, focusing them on growing the business rather than fighting operational fires.

Without automation, IT monitoring would be saddled with unnecessary duplication of effort and human error, slowing the speed of business and creating further opacity, rather than clarity. But by combining them in a single pane of glass ITOM solution, IT teams have a fantastic opportunity to reduce costs, optimize performance and support transformational business growth.

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