



Symantec's Dashboard — a Kaleidoscope of Options

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Management Summary

I remember the first time I picked up a kaleidoscope. I was very young and the kaleidoscope was made from cardboard. The images were blurry at first but I soon discovered out that you could twist the cylinder and make the images come into sharp focus. Twisting the tube again produced more colors and different images. In fact, it seemed like the number of colors and images were almost limitless.

The kaleidoscope is not new. It was known to the ancient Greeks. The word, kaleidoscope, is a combination of three Greek words that means *an instrument that we can see things of beautiful form*. The kaleidoscope was “reinvented” and patented in 1817 by Sir David Brewster and continues to be a popular toy for people of all ages; many artisans produce very beautiful (and expensive) kaleidoscopes today.

By now, you are probably wondering what a kaleidoscope has to do with IT. Consider this for one minute...what if you could have a management console in which you could change the way information is displayed quickly. You could change the type of information that is displayed, the format of the information, and even the color scheme dynamically. In effect, the console would be like a kaleidoscope, allowing you to changes images at will. Symantec is delivering that with its new *Application Service Dashboard*. Read on to find out more about this new product.

Application Service Dashboard

For many data centers, application performance problems are commonplace. Application performance problems can be caused by many factors, such as bottlenecks in the network or in the storage paths, the failure of components between the server and storage, or the dependencies on other applications that are slow to respond. Determining the cause of these problems can be troublesome. Each storage system has its own monitor, applications report response times on their monitors in a different format, and network messages are routed to network consoles. Even the best IT troubleshooter can find it difficult to determine the root cause of the problem. When the systems are running smoothly, it can be difficult to determine if Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are being met. The Applications Service Dashboard brings many of those performance tools to one console, allowing the problem solver to see all of the detail in one place.

The dashboard is a portal that can be customized to show different performance charts and graphs. Need to know the utilization for servers? You can bring up that screen in the right hand corner. Need to

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know the performance of SAP? That chart can be positioned in the upper left corner. What are the current service times for Oracle? Add that graph to the right column. Want to add more performance data? Just add another portlet to the right or left hand column. If you want charts rather than graphs, that can be changed. Prefer a different color scheme? That is accommodated easily. Just like a kaleidoscope, the appearance of the portal can be changed quickly and dynamically.

The current version of *Application Service Dashboard* supports Symantec's application performance management tools, such as *i³ for Oracle Applications*, *i³ for SQL Server*, or *i³ for J2EE*, among others.

Application Service Dashboard **uses JSR 168** portal specifications. *Java Specification Request (JSR) 168* enables interoperability between portals and portlets by defining the APIs that are used to communicate between applications and web servers. This standard is based on cooperation between many vendors including BEA Systems, Fujitsu Limited, Hitachi Ltd., IBM, Oracle, SAP AG, and Sun Microsystems. Using JSR 168 in the dashboard means that any other application that uses this same standard can easily become a portlet for the dashboard. While Symantec has not announced support for other vendor's applications, it is clear that this dashboard is designed to accommodate other applications in the future.

Insight Inquire

Updates to *Insight Inquire* were also announced along with the availability of Application Service Dashboard. This agentless tool records response times throughout the day. While it is important to know how well applications are performing now, it is also important to test the availability of applications at later points. Insight Inquire tests application availability using *synthetic transactions*, which only are used to test availability and execution performance.

Insight Inquire monitors web-based applications and captures these transactions without requiring agents to be installed or scripts

to be written. These collected transactions can be played back later to determine if all of the components required to process the transaction, such as J2EE application servers and web servers, are available.

For example, an IT administrator may run these synthetic transactions after routine maintenance on several servers. The application status report shows an application that is unavailable. Further investigation shows the step in the transaction that faulted. This failed step leads to the web page that has faulted. The server hosting that web page is identified and corrected. The tests can be run again to verify that all components are functioning correctly.

Synthetic transactions are not designed to simulate end-user load, but detect availability and performance problems by simulating end-user activity. Whereas, Symantec's *i³* application performance products measure real end-user response times leveraging collection agents installed on the monitored servers.

Insight Inquire 3.0 has several new features. The database for storing information is now embedded in the application, which removes the requirement (and expense) for installing an Oracle or Sybase DBMS. Symantec has also made the product easier to install and easier to play back synthetic transactions. Support has been broadened for Oracle applications, SAP, Siebel, and PeopleSoft.

Conclusion

The availability of the Application Service Dashboard will be a welcome product for those IT support personnel that must view performance data from different Symantec sources displayed in different locations.

In the future, it would make sense if Symantec broadened the dashboard to be tailored to display all of the company's Data Center Management products. Stay tuned!



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About the Author

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