

Consolidated Communications unifies service management



IBM Tivoli Netcool software is key to company's growth-through-acquisition strategy

Overview

The need

Danny Butler, manager of network surveillance for Consolidated Communications, needed to monitor the health of a large and fast-growing phone, Internet and TV service delivery network.

The solution

The company migrated its incremental network growth to IBM® Tivoli® Netcool®/OMNIBus software to centralize network operations activity and deployed IBM Operations Analytics — Predictive Insights software to prevent service disruptions.

The benefit

Consolidated saves an estimated USD600,000 annually from operational efficiency gains, reducing demands on operators and allowing them to focus on troubleshooting and resolving issues.

Illinois-based Consolidated Communications has evolved from a telephone company to a provider of Internet Protocol television (IPTV), high-speed data and long-haul optical transport services. Danny Butler, manager of network surveillance, must now monitor a growing network encompassing a wide assortment of equipment.

Exploding monitoring needs

Consolidated has adopted a growth strategy based on acquisition, buying local telephone and media properties of like size with similar offerings. Assimilating those companies' systems is a high-stakes challenge, particularly from a service management perspective, given how critical access to media is to the company's customers.

Butler and his surveillance team must constantly monitor conditions such as temperature and humidity at each device to minimize service degradation and disruption. "You can imagine the sheer size of a network serving customers in eight states. We're monitoring performance metrics and the status of all that equipment, so there's just a massive volume of events and alarms," says Butler. "One of the biggest challenges is reducing the complexity of all the alarms originating from new equipment and providing meaningful insights to our operators."

The IBM analytics platform enhances the Consolidated network team's understanding of how the change affects the network. "Before, we didn't have visibility into how that change would manifest in our services, but Predictive Insights tells us that and helps us manage change better," says Danny Butler, manager of network surveillance at Consolidated Communications.



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— Danny Butler, manager of network surveillance, Consolidated Communications

One acquisition expanded Consolidated’s network by 33 percent. The devices Consolidated inherited through the acquisition were on an aging, largely unsupported service management platform. Butler’s objective was to bring all device monitoring activities into one Network Operations Center (NOC), which required consolidating onto one service management platform. Consolidated’s event management solution, however, wasn’t scalable and didn’t support the company’s acquisition strategy.

Centralized control

Consolidated migrated the newly acquired company’s service management platform to IBM Tivoli Netcool/OMNIbus software. “Netcool has been instrumental in allowing us to acquire new companies and bring their network monitoring into a single pane of glass,” says Butler. “One of our competitive differentiators is our ability to see events and rapidly act on them, and a centralized surveillance capability is critical.”

According to Butler, the Tivoli Netcool OMNIbus platform also helps his team enrich events from the disparate data sources onboarded from acquired companies. “When an alarm comes into Netcool, we’re able to connect to a database, determine which customer is impacted and enrich the alarms with information that helps the operator rapidly act on and repair the issue.”

IBM Operations Analytics – Predictive Insights software also aids in early problem detection, predicting issues before they affect service. “We needed a way to threshold performance metrics from the vast number of connections we have to monitor,” says Butler. “Predictive Insights helps us set thresholds dynamically; we no longer set them manually.”

Solution Components

Software

- IBM® Tivoli® Netcool®/OMNIBus
 - IBM Operations Analytics – Predictive Insights
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— Danny Butler, manager of network surveillance, Consolidated Communications

Automation and consolidation

By virtue of the control and efficiency the Tivoli Netcool/OMNIBus platform provides, Consolidated has avoided adding head count at its NOC, even as the company and its networks continue expanding. Additionally, NOC operators now focus all of their efforts on troubleshooting issues and not on researching information to enrich the event, a benefit with bottom-line implications.

“We estimate Consolidated recovers USD600,000 annually in operator time savings,” says Butler. “Netcool does the event research for them, looking up information on the various databases, so operators can immediately get to work fixing the problem. Instead of using a lot of manpower and time investigating a root cause, the combination of Netcool and Predictive Insights suggests that root cause to us.”

Due to Tivoli Netcool/OMNIBus software’s scalability and ease of use, Butler says, “We’re able to bring in new properties in a very short time by reusing the operation network structure we have in place. That means we can provide our standard of service to these new customers very quickly.”

That capability is crucial to Consolidated’s success moving forward. “The faster we can centralize our service management and drive standardization out into the new properties, the better off we are,” says Butler. “So in that sense, Tivoli Netcool and Predictive Insights are absolutely key to our expansion.”

For more information

To learn more about IBM Tivoli Netcool/OMNIBus and IBM Operations Analytics – Predictive Insights software, please contact your IBM marketing representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following websites:

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