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SESSION MONITORING

Fresh Insight

Session monitoring helps ProFlowers stay on top of **web-related** issues

BY REBECCA LOGAN

If a dutiful son were to run into any online snags ordering posies from ProFlowers this month, employees at the floral retailer can quickly take note of his tribulations. That wasn't the case during Mother's Days past, but things changed after ProFlowers installed the TrueSight real-user monitor from Coradiant.

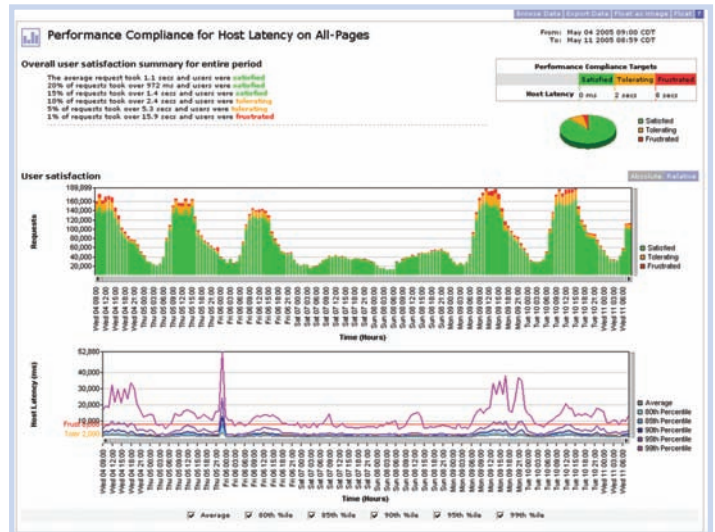
Bharat Gogia, vice president of information systems for ProFlowers, says TrueSight "taps into the real-time stream and shows us what our customer is experiencing. . . . We can actually use that tool to go through a kind of forensic study to understand where the problems are."

It certainly sounds simple enough, but the fact is that Coradiant's

98%
of IT professionals learn about website problems directly from end-users
Source: King Research

used to ascertain how a website was performing, Mulpuru said. But session monitoring allows everyone from IT teams to call-center agents to drill down to specific problems by capturing screenshots of all transactions.

"It enables wiser strategic-planning decisions," Mulpuru said. "It enables any online retailer to get away from 'management by anecdote' [and move toward] 'management by fact.'"



technology falls into a relatively new category called session monitoring.

"Until now, really, the . . . ability to sessionize information didn't exist," Sucharita Mulpuru, a senior analyst for Forrester, said during a webinar tied to her report, "Twelve Technologies that Will Transform Online Retail."

Session monitoring made that list, and Waltham, Mass.-based Coradiant is one of the leading players in this new-but-active space.

Device-monitoring and web analytics have been the primary tools retailers

That's what Kevin Hall sees as the principal benefit of TrueSight. Hall is CIO of ProFlowers, one of the Internet-driven companies in the portfolio of San Diego-based Provide Commerce.

Imagine a case where operational-level monitors are telling the IT staff that a particular server is using more memory than the others. Prior to adopting TrueSight, "we would try to go hunt that down assuming something is happening to customers," Hall says. Truth be told, customers might not be missing a beat. Likewise, the traditional monitors could be indicating that all is well with the sys-

tem, but customers might be becoming frustrated and abandoning their shopping carts.

Such issues could stem from problems at a third-party provider, such as the one that ProFlowers uses for address verification. TrueSight would quickly flag the problem and ProFlowers employees could start taking the steps to remedy it, Hall says.

Coradiant came to develop turnkey session monitoring almost by accident. A decade ago, it was an e-business analyst firm whose clients would often ask how they could be certain that website users were happy.

“We had no good answer,” says Alistair Croll, the company’s co-founder and vice president of product development. “So we went off and built something that would tell them.”

TTrueSight enables strategic planning decisions based on screenshots of all transactions

Session reports

It was this feature that caught Hall’s attention. Croll first called on Hall when Coradiant was focused on actively running clients’ websites. Hall wasn’t interested, but Croll recalls him remarking after the demonstration, “That thing you showed me in the middle? That’s kind of neat.”

Hall was referring to the session reports. Croll received similar feedback from several other companies, and it wasn’t long before Coradiant began work on a turnkey application for session monitoring.

Some time later, Croll was in San Diego meeting with another customer and

called Hall. He asked, “Did you ever put what you’ve got in a can so I can use it?” Coradiant had done just that.

“They realized they had the basis for a great product,” Hall says. “Now it’s basically an appliance.”

TrueSight technology involves a compact piece of hardware plugged into a port. Coradiant sells two varieties. The TS-520, designed for medium-size web operations, costs about \$40,000. The TS-1100, which can process up to 3,000 requests per second and provides 90 days of aggregate performance information in five-minute intervals, sells for \$89,950.



In the past, ProFlowers’ customer service employees would run to the IT department to report consumer complaints. Often, that was the first IT knew of a problem. Once it began using TrueSight, however, the IT staff would already be working on a fix by the time customer service reps made it across the building.

“Now they don’t even come up here anymore because every part of the company knows we’ve got this stuff running,” Hall says.

Earlier this year, a King Research survey sponsored by Coradiant found that 98 percent of 346 responding IT professionals report learning about website problems directly from end users. Of those reporting web-application problems, more than half said their companies lost business as a result.

Robot trouble

Using TrueSight, ProFlowers has established more than 25 watch points that help fill in the gaps not identified by synthetic testing, which Goglia calls “robots” running pre-written scripts. The problem, he says, is that “robots wouldn’t really behave like a customer” and that, especially during peak order times, the system could only sustain a certain volume of synthetic transactions.

It should come as no surprise that companies operating without session monitoring don’t know when a customer is receiving an HTTP Error 500 report, Croll says.

Relative to other service-oriented businesses, retailers are late to the session-monitoring party, having devoted the bulk of their technology budgets to “coming to terms with search engines,” Croll says. The focus has been on finding the right search words and making sure the sites were set up to make them “as sticky as possible.”

Until recently, retailers’ actions have amounted to a big “grab for mind-share.” But that approach is broadening to include a focus on each individual consumer.

“In the past, with retail, they’ve talked about customers in the abstract,” Croll says. “It’s only now, as they start to develop a more solid relationship with their customer, that they worry about the impact web health is having.” **STORES**



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