



UNIVERSITY of ST. THOMAS

“Previously, we had a whole range of system management tools, but they didn’t provide a holistic view.”

TOM MURPHY
CENTRAL SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATOR
ACADEMIC WEB SYSTEMS AT
ST. THOMAS

INDUSTRY

Education

CHALLENGE

IT Staff at St. Thomas needed in-depth statistics about server usage and performance.

WHY USER PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT?

Existing tools were unable to provide a holistic view of server performance. As a result, the Blackboard back-end servers functioned as “black boxes.” This made it difficult to perform capacity planning, troubleshooting, and determining the impact of system upgrades.

SOLUTION

St. Thomas installed Coradiant TrueSight IM, a complete, turnkey reporting device that detects web and database server problems immediately while also providing the forensic details needed to resolve them.

KEY BENEFITS

- Administrators now have detailed statistics on server load and how it impacts performance for use in capacity planning.
- Troubleshooting has been simplified through the ability to track details of every transaction in real time.
- Highly granular views of performance enable St. Thomas to understand the impact of system upgrades.

ST. THOMAS GAINS VISIBILITY INTO WEB-BASED BLACKBOARD APPLICATION WITH TRUESIGHT

With roughly 200 academic programs and nearly 11,000 students, the University of St. Thomas is Minnesota’s largest independent college or university. St. Thomas’ IT department now reaps the real-time benefits of monitoring its web-based course management application with Coradiant TrueSight End-User Experience Management, enabling it to quickly identify and remedy application problems, plan server capacity, and determine the impact of upgrades.

St. Thomas’ IT department administers the web-based course management system from Blackboard, Inc., which allows the university’s 776 faculty members to generate a website for every course they offer. Faculty can post classroom materials, grades, and quizzes—and even host live discussions.

Previously, system administrators used a range of system management tools. “But they didn’t provide a holistic view of Blackboard server metrics,” said Tom Murphy, Central Systems Administrator, Academic Web Systems at St. Thomas, “This made it difficult to troubleshoot problems, perform capacity planning, or determine the impact of software upgrades on performance.”

A demo of the Coradiant TrueSight™ IM (Incident Management) solution convinced the team it had found the solution. Said Murphy, “When we saw TrueSight in action, we quickly realized the value of knowing the details of what was going on under the hood with our Blackboard infrastructure. We also liked the fact that it had a sophisticated and intuitive user interface and that it was a turnkey system that ships fully configured.”

The installation was completed in no time. Said Murphy, “Because TrueSight comes as an appliance, it was incredibly easy to set up. We were up and running and troubleshooting from actual end user data in less than two hours. It’s a perfect fit for managing Blackboard applications.”

PEERING INTO THE BLACK BOX

With the complete visibility TrueSight provides into Blackboard performance, administrators now have the detailed information they need for troubleshooting, capacity planning, and determining the impact of software upgrades. Said Murphy, “As soon as we installed TrueSight we noticed a high number of retransmits. Because TrueSight tracks details of every transaction in real time, we instantly saw that caching requests were generating as much traffic as the actual requests to load new information. By changing the default cache settings, we were able to reduce that number significantly and improve performance. It only took a few minutes to resolve; without TrueSight it would have taken significantly longer to track down the specific cause, and our awareness of the problem would have been at the level of a generic ‘performance issue’ assuming we would have known about it at all.”

CASE STUDY

“When we saw TrueSight in action, we quickly realized the value of knowing the details of what’s going on under the hood of our Blackboard infrastructure.”



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“The team now also has the data it needs to perform accurate capacity planning.” Said Murphy, “We wanted to see how close our servers were to needing a system upgrade. With TrueSight, we were able to look at level of usage, load, page views, hits per second, and so on, and see how that impacts system performance. Thus, TrueSight has given us a definitive way to make sizing and configuration decisions.”

Improved change management is another benefit of the TrueSight system. As Murphy explained, “Previously, we had only anecdotal evidence of the impact of upgrades. While we could determine whether the upgrade functioned, we had no idea of how well it performed. TrueSight provided us with a much more granular view of performance before and after our upgrades. Now we know for sure that our system runs more efficiently and that nothing went sour—it gave us definitive proof of the effectiveness of upgrades.”

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As the team’s familiarity with TrueSight increases, Murphy sees the team using the solution for many more applications. “We’re looking at using this to see who is connecting to Blackboard, where they’re located, and why they’re connecting so we can determine whether

they should be accessing the system. We have people connecting from all over the country for online courses; however, if we see people from suspicious areas we will be able to block their use of the system.”

The group can also envision using TrueSight to help professors with troubleshooting so they better self-manage their Blackboard sites.

However, to date, the biggest benefit, says Murphy, “Has been the ability for less technical users to view the operation of Blackboard servers in a way that makes sense. The visualizations are very easy to understand. It’s a terrific adjunct to Blackboard.”



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ABOUT UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Founded in 1885, the University of St. Thomas is a Catholic, diocesan university based in the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis. The largest private university in Minnesota, St. Thomas offers bachelor's degrees in over 85 major fields of study and more than 45 graduate degree programs including master's, education specialist, juris doctor and doctorates.

ABOUT CORADIANT

Coradiant is the leading provider of equipment used to manage, optimize and troubleshoot web applications. Coradiant's award-winning TrueSight products use customer metrics gathered from each web user visit as their primary data source for IT management. Coradiant End-User Experience Management products are deployed in hundreds of leading organizations and Fortune 500 companies including software as a service (SaaS), e-commerce, entertainment, finance, insurance, healthcare, and education. Coradiant is headquartered in San Diego with offices in North America and Europe.

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