



Monitor What Really Matters

How can you bridge the gap between IT systems and the customer experience?

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If your POS server is running at 65% processor utilization, your authorizing link is up, and your WAN has 300 megabits per second (Mbps) of available bandwidth, how long did it take for the last customer to pay for her purchase at lane three in your Cincinnati store? Does this sound like a trick question? It is.

The answer to this question can sometimes tell you more about how your IT systems are performing than your server and network statistics combined. The answer tells you how IT is supporting the in-store customer experience. So, how can you find the answer to the question posed above? Well, you would need to monitor customer interactions with your IT systems in real time. Then you would need to present this information (hundreds, maybe thousands, of transactions a second) in a useable way to your operations staff. Once the staff has the information, they can spot issues, proactively communicate with store operations, isolate the source of the problem (e.g. applications, client, network, server, etc.), and optimize your IT infrastructure for the best possible customer experience. Sounds hard — and it used to be. But, recent advances in transaction analysis and real-time monitoring technologies are making it possible for major retailers to achieve this kind of visibility in a cost-effective and timely manner.

As IT departments strive to adopt customer-centric processes, they are discovering that back end ‘quality of service’ metrics, such as CPU usage, bandwidth, and server downtime are not enough. They are turning to a new breed of transaction monitoring technologies to gather ‘quality of experience’ metrics that directly impact the customer experience, such as point of service application slowdowns, transaction completion times, and credit transaction failures. Any IT issues that may result in store system outages, application slowdowns, or credit transaction failures need to be detected, isolated, and fixed in a proactive manner. This must happen prior to hitting a level of crisis escalation that can negatively impact the end customer experience or revenue stream.

New off-the-shelf products are helping IT see, in real time, what customers are experiencing as they interact with store-level kiosks and POS systems and how the resulting transactions flow across the entire IT infrastructure, including third-party systems and complex network infrastructures involving SOA (service-oriented

architecture), SaaS (software as a service), and other Web-based applications. These technologies are augmenting the productivity and organizational effectiveness of IT teams through 24/7 critical transaction monitoring and the ability to correlate and report intelligence on a level of detail no human would be able to deliver in real time. Previously 'invisible' events like transaction slowdowns, intermittent failures, or temporary outages can instantly surface along with the underlying detail required to understand and isolate the source of these performance problems.

Consider Customization Costs

Retailers considering an investment in transaction intelligence technology still need to consider implementation and deployment costs. Older application monitoring technologies can require customization to recognize common retail business transactions and can rely on agents on every server and network device. Some newer business transaction monitoring systems can typically support customer-facing retail business transactions out-of-the-box and analyze network traffic to enable nondisruptive deployment.

Remember your Cincinnati customer in lane three? The transaction took 5 seconds, and she paid the \$32.14 with a Bank of America debit card. If you rescheduled your store-level inventory data transfer an hour later, you could have shaved 2 seconds off the processing time for her and every other customer in the store from 5 to 6 p.m. And that is an example of monitoring what really matters.