

Associated Newspapers

ASSOCIATED NEWSPAPERS

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Results

VMware vFabric tc Server delivers the following business results to DSD:

- Fast Testing And Live Deployments - Reduced From Hours To Minutes
- Rapid Turnaround On Production Fixes
- Proactive Problem Solving
- Website High Availability - 100 percent Uptime
- Improved Server Performance - Increased By 3x
- Reduced Server Costs
- More Features

Associated Newspapers Keeps Websites Competitive with VMware vFabric tc Server™

The Digital Services Division (DSD) of Associated Newspapers (ANL) provides all online development and infrastructure services to ANL’s online portfolio of newspaper web sites. This includes the Daily Mail, UK’s largest online newspaper website, as well as Evening Standard, This Is Money, Metro and 150+ regional sites. ANL’s goal is to deliver websites that offer an engaging and satisfying experience for users and measurable commercial benefits to advertisers. ANL is part of the Daily Mail and General Trust plc.

Challenge

For DSD, the ability to turn around new website and feature releases without disrupting website availability were essential to maintaining a leadership position in UK online news. Unfortunately, DSD’s seven development teams faced challenges using Oracle WebLogic, the previous application server.

Prior to deploying VMware vFabric tc Server, the DSD development teams invested too much developer effort doing builds and releases during their two-week release cycle using WebLogic. Every time something failed during test, staging or deployment, they would have to wait 1-2 hours for the application to build and deploy on WebLogic.

“Developers could waste up to three hours every time they deployed a new application and waited for WebLogic to start up,” recalls Shaun Perkinson, Head of Development. “It became a timeconsuming and costly process. It was really sapping our development resources.”

“In the newspaper environment, we constantly need to find new and innovative ways to monetize our content,” Perkinson continues. “Ideas for new features are coming through all the time, and for us to be able to turn those features around and get them to market quickly is absolutely key. But with Oracle WebLogic, developers were constantly task switching while waiting for Oracle WebLogic to deploy and start up our applications after each test and staging release.”

“On the production side, it was very difficult for us to firefight and deal with issues,” he adds, explaining that they had a completely reactive approach to problems.

Solution

To solve these challenges, DSD switched all web applications running on Oracle WebLogic to tc Server for development, testing, staging and production environments. tc Server – the enterprise version of Apache Tomcat, the world’s most widely used open source application server – is a lightweight server offering operational management, advanced diagnostics, and mission-critical support capabilities.

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Service

“Support for WebLogic and tc Server are miles apart,” Perkinson says about their SpringSource support contract. “We didn’t always get the best people from WebLogic. But with SpringSource support, we got one of the lead committers of Tomcat to actually come on site. He was here when we made the live switch from Weblogic to tc Server and resolved the small number of issues we had in minutes. SpringSource support is something I would recommend to anyone switching to tc Server. It is worth it.”

Benefits

tc Server delivers the following business results to DSD:

Fast Testing and Live Deployments

“Test and live deployments are taking the developers literally a couple of minutes with tc Server – where they used to take up to two hours on WebLogic,” Perkinson says. “So developers are freed up to concentrate on their development tasks.”

Rapid Turnaround on Production Fixes

“From a production firefighting point of view, tc Server is crucial for us to be able to turn fixes around a lot quicker,” says Perkinson.

Proactive Problem Solving

“tc Server provides more real-time information, so we can constantly monitor the health of the server, see trends and analyze issues,” says Perkinson. “Before, we just reacted – and restarted servers – when something went wrong. Now we can be more proactive about dealing with issues before a problem actually occurs.”

Website High Availability

tc Server enables the DSD team to solve issues before they become problems, ensuring critical high availability for the company’s many websites. Even if they have to stop and restart a server to solve a problem, it can be done in less than two minutes, so the business and the website users do not experience an outage.

Improved Server Performance

“The throughput on tc Server is at least 3x greater than WebLogic and the CPU and load on the production servers is about half,” says Perkinson. “The application can deal with many more concurrent requests with the throughput being so much higher. This also means if we do have to take a server out of the load balancer to do any work on it, we can run on two servers perfectly fine, and we have the confidence that we will not have any issues. We did not have that confidence with WebLogic at all.”

Reduced Server Costs

With WebLogic, ANL was planning to purchase a fourth and even a fifth server to handle the load, but tc Server can handle the load fine on the original three servers. “tc Server rules out the need for us to buy any new hardware,” Perkinson concludes. “There is plenty of capacity for growth with tc Server on our current infrastructure, with no need to scale.”

“To keep tc Server running on three servers is a financial saving for ANL,” he adds, noting that costs for each additional server add up when you consider the expenses for hardware, software licensing, support and maintenance.

More Features

With tc Server, the development teams are also able to deliver more features to market because they are spending more time developing and less time waiting for WebLogic to start up new deployments.

