

Systems Management - The Brains Behind Barbie

CCSS - Mattel's choice for a systems management solution

Sustaining a \$1.9 billion dollar industry and representing a significant proportion of Mattel's success, Barbie is big business. Tyco Toys and Fisher Price also contribute to their growing empire, making them synonymous with toys around the world.

Daniel Cruthirds and Joe Jaffe, key members of Mattel's technical support team, are responsible for 31 IBM eServer iSeries systems worldwide and the systems management of their top fourteen iSeries Servers which they monitor from their desktops at Mattel's El Segundo HQ in California. Daniel Cruthirds explains: "Our network dictates a huge communications environment that requires effective management twenty-four hours a day. Losing a major production system could cause the whole company to stop - so it's absolutely essential we have optimum availability."

The nature of their network saw them dealing with a number of problems common to larger companies, including a lack of centralised visibility, language barriers and time-zone hindrances. "By the time we got a message from Australia needing help with a system problem, it had come and gone so we really weren't able to be pro-active to their requests." says Cruthirds.

CCSS's QSystem Monitor makes Mattel's vision for a pro-active systems management environment a desktop reality. Known throughout the USA and Europe as providers of iSeries system management software, CCSS's comprehensive understanding of the problems faced by iSeries operators led them to develop QSystem Monitor - their fully graphical, networked real-time performance management tool.



By defining thresholds for key performance parameters and alerting operators to problems through visual and audio alerts, QSystem Monitor brings about a management-by-exception status for networked iSeries Servers. Real-time and historical performance information can be viewed for immediate identification and resolution. Cruthirds



says of the product, "I liked it immediately. I could sit at my PC and monitor all the systems to see what everyone was up to. I didn't have to wait and run IBM's performance tools and get them involved to help us decipher the results. It was very easy to use, right from the start."

Due to its remote location at the time, the company was coping with unreliable tele-communications and a shortage of IS people with the technical experience needed to manage their system in Jakarta, Indonesia. Consequently, performance problems escalated and erratic disk utilisation was becoming a major concern. After installing QSystem Monitor, problems on the system were immediately apparent. Cruthirds remembers DASD utilisation had reached 92%. He says, "QSystem Monitor really helped us because we knew DASD utilisation could have climbed very quickly very fast. We potentially could have lost the system. Fortunately we caught it in time." They were able to respond immediately by clearing up a lot of unused files that had been left on the system. Today, keeping abreast of the DASD utilisation in Jakarta is done with a single click of the mouse, from a desktop in California.

Through QSystem Monitor, operators can choose to dynamically view any number of jobs that are using the highest amount of CPU for each system. QSystem Monitor runs on the PC in their data centre in Phoenix, Arizona where they monitor distribution and job queues whilst the team in California watch over machine pools, batch performance, jobs active, interactive batch, CPU utilisation and DASD to name but a few.

Joe Jaffe cites the history reporting features as another reason why QSystem Monitor works so well for Mattel's requirements: "We can compare interactive response or batch response over any period very easily without any of the problems associated with time differences." The graphical attributes of the product make it easy to produce regular management reports. Cruthirds says, "The

history reporting lets us go back as far as we keep the data and pull off three dimensional graphs that are easy for management to make their evaluations on. It makes a lot of difference."

Mattel are able to pinpoint peaks through the short-term and detailed history analysis, to instantly show jobs using the most CPU and to identify users and jobs acquiring large amounts of system resources. Also, threshold levels are shown in these modules, making it ideal for obtaining accurate performance trends and creating comparisons between actual, and IBM's recommended iSeries results.

During a recent European iSeries consolidation QSystem Monitor proved invaluable by taking "snapshot" pictures of the system before and after adding the UK and French systems. "Our management loved the pictorial representation - it was very clear to everyone exactly what kind of shape we were in at each stage of the migration." says Cruthirds.

As specialist developers, CCSS are able to look at customers' individual environments and even help tailor the product specifically for that company's needs. As Mattel continues to grow, so too does their dependence on system availability and performance. Cruthirds says, "CCSS has provided excellent support." As a company that expects innovation as much from its IT department as it does from its creative toy designers, Mattel's philosophy has seen their success continue to grow with each generation. With effective systems management at the core of their operations, no doubt the Barbie business will be booming well into the next millennium.

For more information on CCSS products visit:

Website: www.ccssltd.com



CCSS
Monitoring your system