OTG Continues to Brew the Recipe for Success with CCSS

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Christian Winklcreth

OTG has trusted systems management expert CCSS and their products QSystem Monitor (QSM) and QMessage Monitor (QMM) to help them meet the demands of their busy network for the last ten years. In that time OTG has experienced substantial growth and yet has maintained a skeletal team of two people. Christian Winklareth, OTG's Systems Administrator for the iSeries, is primarily responsible for the daily management of the network and ensuring 24/7 systems availability required by the business and its 1,500 employees. Winklareth says, "The CCSS software lets me, one person, manage multiple machines in a way that is so simple - I could easily manage another 10–20 systems by myself with no problems."

Winklareth cites the good developer relationship between CCSS and OTG as a critical component in their long standing association, and a factor that adds tangible value to their business:

"Business is made between people, not companies, and CCSS really listens to their customers - their influence is seen in the products' development. In our experience it's what other companies strive for but CCSS achieves." The intuitive use of QSM and QMM's rich functionality has become both a cost justification for the products as well as saved the company the expense of increasing their overheads to match the network's growth. This is only possible through the creation of a management-by exception approach. For example, extensive use of QMM's powerful auto response and filtering means that only the most urgent messages require a response and many routine checklists and daily tasks are automated to reduce the active workload.

Primary applications running on the network include ERP, financial and warehouse software, all of which form the basis for the company's core daily operations. With downtime valued at a rate of €55,000 per hour, keeping these applications and systems available to the end user community of 550 people is the main priority. Winklareth illustrates the level of dependence saying, "I directly control the warehouse with my iSeries.

In short, if it's not online, the warehouse would come to a complete standstill and the trucks could not leave, impacting our entire logistics and supply chain process."

Winklareth manages the network from his PC console using the Monitor module of QSystem Monitor. This provides total and immediate visibility to any threats to the system's availability or performance. The console displays real-time views for each system and their most important jobs, subsystems and parameters. QSM keeps a watchful eye on the fifty daily batch jobs and communications between the warehouse software and ERP, the ERP and finance application and the external iSeries. As an example of how critical some of these jobs are, Winklareth explains that if a file used by a central batch job exceeded 100 records, problems would resonate to the sales, production and warehouse departments. To ensure this does not happen, the file is monitored in real-time. An attached threshold will sound an alarm if the critical number of records is exceeded, giving administrators advance notice and time to resolve the issue. Innovative use of threshold shows the versatility of the product. OTG has assigned a monitor and associated threshold alert to the number of users on a particular application to ensure compliance limitations are not exceeded for applications with concurrent licences. This allows OTG to avoid additional expense and provide an independent analysis of the number of users at any given time.

Warehouse control jobs are also monitored for any problem between the iSeries and the controlling units of the warehouse. These are identified immediately by turning from green to flashing red on the online monitor. In this situation, Winklareth need only click on the red flashing bar to retrieve information showing the cause of the problem. He says, "Without QSystem Monitor the task to identify the cause and the offending job would be lengthy and tedious, and in some cases, it would be almost impossible to know where to start, so this level of efficiency is something we value."

Winklareth uses QSM to oversee the monitoring and management of jobs that are responsible for communications from the iSeries to OTG's centralized reporting server, an SQL cluster. Many jobs running in the SQL database generate real-time reports for the sales department who rely on instant access to accurate data to perform their tasks. This reliance extends to the production planning department where a supply chain management system depends on the same type of communication via journaling and mirroring of the data to an SQL database. Problems that are not addressed the near daily production plans generated by each location.

As part of their range, OTG produces medicinal teas and is subject to strict national regulatory legislation, which dictates if production data is offline, production machines must stop in all locations. QSM ensures a number of vital communications lines and back up lines to the database are in an active state. This example typifies best use of the solutions for a pro-active approach. The CCSS solutions help to reduce the risk of potentially disastrous situations that could halt production and reinforce the effectiveness of supporting protocols, such as High Availability solutions and backup communications lines, by addressing system risks at their source.

QSM's Disk Inquiry function (MONDSKINQ) provides fast interrogation of the system files containing deleted records from the central database providing an instant 'hit list' to aid the reorganisation of the database. Similarly, monthly reports relating to the demands of the annual IT audit to maintain OTG's banking rating, or those required on a more ad hoc basis, can be created very quickly and shared with colleagues. The detailed data accessed through the Detailed History module helps Winklareth to pinpoint spikes in parameters such as response time. By clicking on a spike in the historical chart, he can immediately identify the offending job, user and other important information required for fast resolution. He says, "Without QSM, I simply wouldn't be able to extract that information manually from the system, and certainly not instantly." With the benefits of CCSS's automation so well realised at OTG, he won't have to.

CCSS
Monitoring your systems