



Microsoft Exchange Soars at the Phoenix

When The Phoenix needed to troubleshoot serious performance problems in its Exchange environment, the company turned to Spotlight on Exchange. Thanks to Spotlight, Exchange performance has improved dramatically, and Exchange-related user complaints have been totally eliminated. The Phoenix also relies on MessageStats and Reporter for enhanced management of its messaging and Windows environments.

The Challenge

When The Phoenix migrated from Exchange 5.5 to Exchange 2000, the company chose to consolidate its four messaging servers to a single, centralized system. Eran Levi, Manager of the Microsoft technology team at The Phoenix, explains his team's thinking: "Based on our extensive experience with Exchange 5.5, we knew that—given proper capacity planning—we would be able to support our 1200 users on a single server. From a network perspective, we were also ready for the consolidation: most of our users are centrally located in headquarters, and we have fast network connections to our 11 other physical locations."

"Naturally," continues Levi, "consolidation was very attractive from an administrative point of view—it's easier to maintain one server instead of four. Of course, we also realized that the performance and availability of our single, centralized server would be critical."

The migration and consolidation were completed as planned, but not everyone was happy. End-users were complaining about slow performance, and the cause of these problems was unclear. Fortunately, Spotlight on Exchange was already on hand. And that's where Levi's team turned to, in search of answers.

The Quest Solution

"We choose Spotlight because we needed a tool that could answer critical questions about our Exchange environment," explains Roy Barkai, a Microsoft technology specialist in Levi's team. "We needed to know: Is there a problem? And if so, in what component? This enables to resolve problems quickly, and then move on to our many other tasks. We are a relatively small team, with responsibility for all of The Phoenix's Microsoft infrastructure. Managing Exchange is only a small part of what we do. So we needed a tool that would really be effective and enhance our management capabilities—not manage us."

"We always look at multiple solutions when evaluating products," comments Barkai, "but in the case of Spotlight the choice was clear. I know of quite a few tools for monitoring Exchange, but none of these looks at the system in its entirety. Looking at several 'counters' in isolation is not enough to characterize a problem. Instead, Spotlight gives us the full picture. We can see how the various components within Exchange are performing and how they are influencing each other. And once we have identified the problematic component, we can drill down into it to troubleshoot the cause."

Spotlight revealed that the initial post-migration performance problems were being caused by contention on the underlying storage system. "At the time of the Exchange migration we also introduced a network-attached storage solution. We knew that the same storage device was supporting many other applications in the company, but we didn't realize how much this contention would affect Exchange. Spotlight showed us clearly what was going on. For example, we could see that the 'Current Disk Queue' was very large, and that increases in the disk queue correlated with user complaints."

Quest Software Products

Spotlight on Exchange, MessageStats, Reporter

Environment

- 1200 Windows users
- Microsoft Exchange 2000
- Microsoft Active Directory 2000

Benefits

- Achieved major performance gains on Exchange
- Eliminated Exchange-related user complaints

Levi's team addressed the problem by dedicating a separate storage device to Exchange, and has continued to rely on Spotlight for on-going troubleshooting.

"The ability to identify the component which is causing the problem is very important," stresses Barkai. "That's key to avoiding unnecessary end-user downtime. For example, one day several users claimed that messages weren't reaching their destination, even within the company. Spotlight showed me that the inbound and outbound queues were full, and that the problem was with the MTA [Message Transfer Agent]. Restarting the MTA service solved the problem, without requiring a reboot of the entire system."

The Phoenix also uses MessageStats and Reporter for enhancing the management of their Exchange and Windows environment. "MessageStats helps us to better understand how different parts of the organization are using Exchange and to plan accordingly," says Barkai. "In particular, it has helped us with capacity planning for our network and storage requirements. Reporter has proven to be a very powerful, yet easy-to-use tool for reporting on many aspects of our Windows environment. That has allowed us to turn over quite a few mundane tasks to the operations team, instead of having to dedicate a Microsoft expert to handle them."

The Bottom Line

In conclusion, Levi singles out Spotlight for special praise: "The tool did everything we had hoped for. As a result, Exchange performance has improved dramatically. I am proud to say that user complaints regarding Exchange have been totally eliminated."

About Phoenix

Founded in 1949, The Phoenix is one of Israel's leading insurance companies. Through its nationwide network of authorized agents, The Phoenix provides its individual and corporate customers with a full range of insurance products including general, life, health and nursing insurance. Headquartered near Tel-Aviv, the company maintains dozens of offices across Israel, linking a workforce of more than 1,000 employees. Granted a high AA rating by the Ma'alot credit rating company, The Phoenix ended 2003 with a net profit of NIS 232 million. Total assets for the year ended 2003 reached NIS 21.3 billion.

About Quest Software, Inc.

Quest Software, Inc. delivers innovative products that help organizations get more performance and productivity from their applications, databases and Windows infrastructure. Through a deep expertise in IT operations and a continued focus on what works best, Quest helps more than 18,000 customers worldwide meet higher expectations for enterprise IT. Quest Software can be found in offices around the globe and at www.quest.com