Westralia Airports Corporation Takes Off with Powerful IT Monitoring Tool

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>
> Toby Heaford, Systems Administrator, Westralia Airports Corporation

IT staff at Westralia Airports Corporation (WAC), the operator of Perth Airport, struggled to manage an increasingly complex technology environment. WAC worked with Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner DSC-IT to implement Microsoft System Center Essentials 2007. By centralizing its IT management, WAC estimates that it will reduce the time it spends monitoring servers, client workstations, and applications by more than half.

Customer: Westralia Airports Corporation
Web Site: www.perthairport.com
Customer Size: 100–5,000
Country or Region: Australia
Industry: Aviation
Partner: DSC-IT

Customer Profile
Since privatization in 1997, Westralia Airports Corporation (WAC) has operated Perth Airport under a 99-year lease.

Software and Services
- Products
  - Microsoft® System Center Essentials 2007
  - SQL Server™ 2000
  - SQL Server 2005

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Business Needs
When Australia's airports were privatized in 1997, Westralia Airports Corporation (WAC) became the operator of Perth Airport under a 99-year leasehold from the Federal Government.

Perth Airport plays a vital role in Western Australia's economy, with more than 1,900 flights arriving and departing each week.

WAC manages the airport's infrastructure and surrounding 2,105-hectare (5,200-acre) estate. The organization employs approximately 160 staff in areas including airport operations, retail, transport, management, and administration.

WAC's five-member IT team manages Perth Airport's complex IT infrastructure. In addition to 22 servers and 120 computers covering corporate systems, the team is responsible for critical operational systems, such as flight information displays and airport resource management systems.

"Our technology environment had grown rapidly over the past few years," says Toby Heaford, Systems Administrator, Westralia Airports Corporation.

"One of the challenges of working at an airport is that it never shuts down, so we need to maintain 24-hour availability for key applications."

With critical infrastructure spread across the airport campus, and no centralized tool to monitor all systems, IT staff found it difficult to provide proactive and timely IT support.

"We spent a lot of time monitoring servers and collecting information to try and get a clear picture of what was going on," explains Heaford. "We had an alerting system that told us if a server went offline, but it didn't provide any detail or analysis. We knew this was not an ideal situation and certainly not the best use of our time.

"We investigated a range of monitoring solutions including HP OpenView, IBM Tivoli, Microsoft® Systems Management Server 2003, and Microsoft Operations Manager 2005 but found these high-end products overly complicated and expensive for a business of our size."

Solution

WAC became an early adopter of Microsoft System Center Essentials 2007 with the help of Microsoft Gold Certified Partner DSC-IT. Specifically designed to meet the needs of mid-sized businesses with up to 500 computers and 30 servers, System Center Essentials provides a unified environment for IT professionals to proactively and efficiently manage their IT systems.

"System Center Essentials offered us everything we needed, plus some additional benefits," says Heaford. "We recognized that System Center Essentials had the server monitoring capabilities we needed and could also help us manage our workstation fleet and maintain our hardware and software inventory."

In March 2007, WAC worked with DSC-IT to conduct a limited deployment of the package

to monitor 11 servers (seven of which are virtual) across the campus network.

"The IT team at WAC was instantly impressed by the granularity of monitoring and management provided by System Center Essentials," says Mark O'Malley, Managing Director of DSC-IT. "Their previous system only told them if a server was on or off. Now they will be able to take advantage of features such as trending, reports, and alerts."

System Center Essentials allows the IT team to view the health of physical and virtual servers—including Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 and SQL Server 2005 databases—on one screen. WAC also uses the systems management tool to roll out software updates to servers in place of Microsoft Windows Server® Update Services.

Once the pilot project is completed, WAC will roll out the system across its entire network.

"We're really looking forward to the full deployment and using additional features such as workstation monitoring and application deployment," says Heaford.

Benefits

The implementation of System Center Essentials 2007 will transform the way WAC's IT team works.

Improved server monitoring. Heaford estimates that System Center Essentials will halve the time the IT team spends monitoring servers, client workstations, and applications—from six hours per day to two or three.

"Monitoring our servers using one tool and having all the information we need in one place will ensure that we are aware of issues

earlier and can resolve them faster. We estimate that using System Center Essentials will cut the percentage of time we spend diagnosing problems from 60 percent to 20 percent. The tool highlights the area where there's a problem and even provides pointers on how to fix it."

Single source of information. System Center Essentials will give the IT department a snapshot of WAC's entire system in a dashboard interface that aggregates data from all its servers.

"It is an enormous benefit to have a clear overview of our whole environment on one screen through a familiar and intuitive Microsoft interface," says Heaford.

Automated inventory. WAC looks forward to using System Center Essentials for a range of other IT management tasks.

"System Center Essentials will give us an automatic inventory of all our computers and installed software," says Heaford. "Instead of using multiple tools to collate this data, we will have it at our fingertips. We really weren't expecting this functionality from the product, so it is a huge bonus."

Increased efficiency. WAC will be able to reduce time spent on mundane maintenance tasks and allow IT staff to work proactively to improve system performance.

"We see huge potential for Microsoft System Center Essentials to increase our efficiency and productivity," says Heaford. "This tool will help us regain control of our IT environment and deliver improved services across the airport."

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