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Product Review: Visual Network Systems VPM Connex™

Over the last few years IT organizations have received a consistent, simple message. That message is that it is critical for them to align with their company's business and functional managers. While the message is simple, it is difficult to enact. I believe that the difficulty comes in large part from the fact that IT organizations have historically planned and managed around individual technology domains; e.g., LAN, WAN, servers, firewalls. It has been my experience however, that a company's business and functional managers generally don't care about individual technology domains. They care about the processes that they use to run their business units and the applications that support those processes.

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Introduction

Over the last few years IT organizations have received a consistent, simple message. That message is that it is critical for them to align with their company’s business and functional managers. While the message is simple, it is difficult to enact. I believe that the difficulty comes in large part from the fact that IT organizations have historically planned and managed around individual technology domains; e.g., LAN, WAN, servers, firewalls. It has been my experience however, that a company’s business and functional managers generally don’t care about individual technology domains. They care about the processes that they use to run their business units and the applications that support those processes.

Another challenge facing IT organizations is that due to the complexity of the typical IT environment, when the performance of an application is degrading, that degradation is typically noticed first by the end users and not by the IT organization. In addition, when the IT organization is made aware of the fact that the performance of an application has degraded, it typically is unaware of the cause of the degradation. Given the sheer number of components in the IT infrastructure, the time it takes to troubleshoot the problem can be lengthy.

A few months ago, I published a report entitled Application Delivery: A Reality Check . Based on a survey that was administered to 356 IT professionals, that report identified the challenges that IT organizations are currently having relative to ensuring acceptable application delivery. As I highlighted in the report, in 2010 the optimization task that is the most important and the most difficult for IT organizations is relating the performance of applications to their impact on the business. In addition, in 2010 the management task that is the most important and the most difficult for IT organizations is rapidly identifying the root cause of degraded application performance.

In an attempt to overcome these application delivery challenges and to respond to what their company’s business and functional managers care about, many IT organizations are beginning to develop a focus on Business Service Management (BSM). BSM is the practice of managing IT services from a business perspective, including monitoring the level of service delivered to users who are accessing critical business applications and services. The term BSM is derived from ITIL (IT Infrastructure Library) version 3, which defines BSM as "an approach to the management of IT Services that considers the business processes supported and the business value provided."

Visual Performance Manager™ and VPM Connex™

Effective BSM is highly dependent on a performance management system that provides visibility not only into the end user experience, but also into how performance within each of the various tiers of the overall system (e.g., application, server, and network) affects the level of service delivered to the end user. Granular performance measurements provide significant value if those measurements can be integrated with key infrastructure management functions, such as event management, configuration management, and service level reporting. The Visual Network Systems performance management solution for service management is based on Visual Performance Manager (VPM) and VPM Connex, a web services platform that allows third party solutions to integrate with VPM.

Visual Performance Manager

Visual Performance Manager (VPM) appliances passively monitor network transactions to determine how end user response time and application latency are affected by infrastructure elements on the end-to-end path between users and application. As shown in Figure 1, VPM recognizes critical business applications and correlates application performance data with network flow data. The resulting end-to-end transaction data is stored in the appliance’s database where it can be accessed and used for troubleshooting, baselining, error detection, performance and availability analysis, trend reporting and other critical management functions.

¹ <http://www.webtorials.com/content/2010/04/2010-app-del.html>

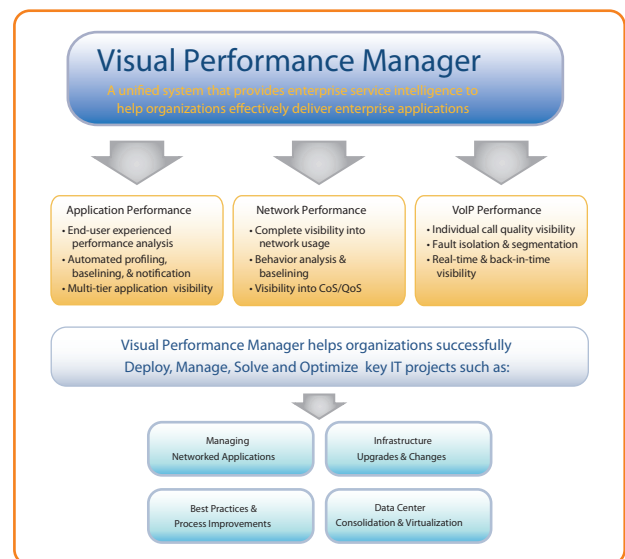


Figure 1: Visual Performance Manager flexible architecture can help organizations successfully manage the entire lifecycle of key IT projects.

VPM Connex

VPM Connex is a set of industry-standard integration capabilities that enable VPM to exchange information bi-directionally with virtually any management system or platform, including automated BSM platforms. Integration of VPM performance data with a BSM system via VPM Connex facilitates significant improvement in a number of management workflows. In particular, improved performance visibility and more efficient workflows equate to improved service levels and more demonstrable IT support for business operations. Specific benefits of BSM integration via VPM Connex include:

- Improvement in the efficiency of incident management by automating portions of the trouble-ticket workflow and by providing performance data in standard formats to assist in diagnostics and troubleshooting.
- Support for improved reporting of application performance, including dashboard reporting of business service status for executive audiences.
- Support for automated configuration management of VPM appliances via a central configuration management database.

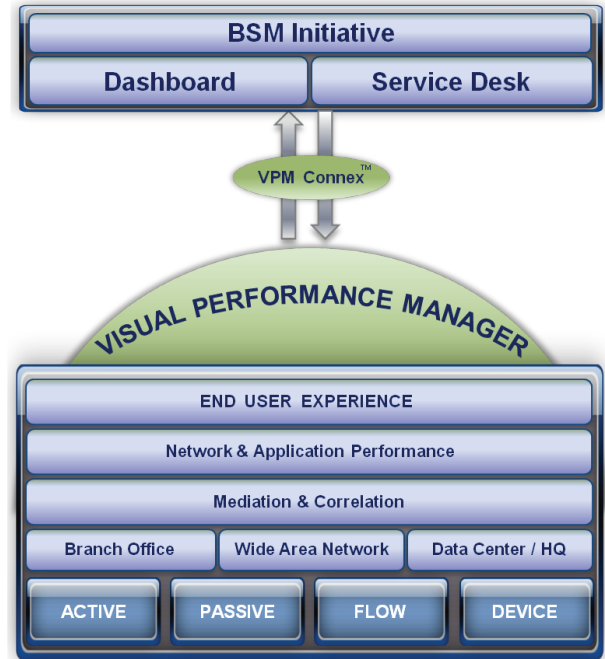


Figure 2: The bi-directional integration of VPM Connex between VPM and IT Process Automation tools helps organizations improve incident management efficiency and the accuracy of IT incident business reporting.

Summary

In the introduction I mentioned some of the barriers that limit the success of most IT organizations. I believe the Visual Network Systems VPM Connex is a major step towards eliminating those barriers. I say that in part because the data provided by VPM helps IT organizations identify application performance problems and perform root cause analysis to identify the cause of the problem before end users are impacted. I also say that in part because of the ability of VPM Connex to support a range of automation and to enable effective dashboard reporting. Taken together, these capabilities represent a major step towards enabling IT organization to achieve the goals of BSM.

About the Author

Jim Metzler is widely recognized as an authority on both network technology and its business applications. In over 30 years of professional experience, Jim has worked in virtually every aspect of the networking industry. This includes creating software tools to design customer networks for a major IXC; being an Engineering Manager for high speed data services for a major Telco; being a Product Manager for network hardware; managing networks at two Fortune 500 companies; directing and performing market research at a major industry analyst firm; and running a consulting organization.



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