

Performance Guard™

DSB - Business Case



No more angry IT end-user on the phone

It must be a familiar situation for all those poor souls manning the world's help desks: the annoyed client user on the line claiming, "The system is running too slow!" The same was once true at DSB Informatik, the IT department of Danish State Railways, until one day when the phone rang, and it was CapaSystems on the line. Since then, the phone does not ring nearly as often with complaints about response times.

"Our help desk received regular complaints about long response times on our central sales system – and sometimes the callers were pretty mad. Unfortunately, the help desk personnel were not always able to tell the users what the problem was, let alone the size or scope of it," relates Søren Beck Petersen, who does not look like a man given to panic. As Operations Manager for DSB's main IT installation, he is naturally quite used to keeping his cool. But of course, the dissatisfied users did leave a wrinkle in his professional pride - that was back in 2002 though.

ROSA poses a problem

One of the core systems at DSB is called ROSA, an abbreviation that stands for Reservation, Oplysning (information), Sales and Administration. ROSA is the backbone of DSB's customer service. If the system fails or performs very slowly, it can be felt on both sides of the counter at DSB's booking offices, by both employees and customers.

As with all other types of big, customer-oriented service systems, ROSA has been subject to constant development and new functionality additions. One such addition is an internet-based self-service travel-planner, which is linked directly to ROSA and constantly updated with new func-

tionality. Unfortunately, functionality has a lot in common with complexity, and in 2002 ROSA was therefore often the cause of calls from users complaining about long response times. This even though ROSA was generally – and still is – a well-functioning system. In such situations, however, DSB Informatik often had trouble localizing the cause of the problem.

Tried several tools

Of course, Petersen and his colleagues at DSB Informatik did not just wring their hands in despair. Several different monitoring and reporting tools were tried, but according to Petersen they all proved to be too complicated and required too much development, were only applicable to certain elements, or were too expensive – some even suffered from all three symptoms. At the end of the day, nothing they tried gave the desired result. Consequently, most measurements (when it was at all possible to create a realistic measurement environment) were performed manually using a stopwatch – no easy task if an acute problem had to be analyzed for ticket offices in different cities simultaneously.



Every year, DSB transports about 150 million people (including the Copenhagen Subway-trains). The central reservation, information, sales, and administration (ROSA) system completes 17 million transactions per year and at peak times, such as weekends or holidays, handles 12,000 transactions per hour. DSB has 193 ticket offices all over the country.

Late in 2002 – when reservations and tickets sales for the holiday season were begun and the ROSA system was becoming heavily loaded

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“The most important thing about Performance Guard™ is its ability to objectively measure response time as the user actually experiences it. Talking to the user about response times can therefore be based on facts. We can also localize the source of the problem to a given PC, network, or the central application”.

- DSB Informatik Operations Manager Søren Beck Petersen.

Søren Beck Petersen received a call from CapaSystems. The CapaSystems consultant said two things that encouraged Petersen to try yet another measurement and reporting tool: first, measurements and response times in CapaSystems' Performance Guard™ are based on the individual user's view; and second, Performance Guard™ works as a very thin client on the user's PC without overloading either the PC or supporting systems.

Proof of Concept

A test installation – or 'Proof of Concept' – was set up at DSB, and in the week it was in operation, DSB Informatik was already able to realize Performance Guard's efficiency: “There were response-time problems certain places in the Proof of Concept installation,” says Petersen. “But the measurements taken also showed that in many cases, response times were much faster than the user actually realized.”

The test installation was replaced by the real thing, with around 200 automatic and simultaneous measurements on PC's among users all over the country. Petersen and his colleagues at DSB Informatik quickly learned that the users were positive. When there were genuine response-time problems for a user, Performance Guard™ rapidly and efficiently localized the problem to the PC, the communications lines, or the

central application equipment. Efforts to solve the problem could thus be deployed in the right direction. For the same reason, users were quickly willing to respect the objective measurement of response times rather than their own more subjective feelings.

The Great Belt link is highly popular with DSB passengers, and when rail traffic is at its peak, the IT net is heavily loaded.



From unsolvable to quickly resolved

“We have quite simply gained a much more qualified foundation on which to base our facts,” as Petersen puts it. “And the users now find that problems once deemed to be ‘unsolvable’ are now tagged ‘quickly resolved’! Using Performance Guard™, we conduct our measurements directly in the actual situation. And we are often so fast that we can fix a potential problem before it is even reported, as we can track tendencies through our measurements.”

A contributing factor to Performance Guard's positive reception among DSB's users is that the measurement results are published in certain reports on DSB's intranet.

The productivity bonus is there to be seen; previously, a call about response times could in the worst case lead to several days work and a trip to the site armed with a stopwatch. Today, such manual and tedious measurements are a thing of the past.

SLA and testing

But it's not just the Help Desk function that Performance Guard has been able to help. As supplier of IT services to the entire DSB group, DSB Informatik has many customers, all covered by an SLA (Service Level Agreement). After the introduction of Performance Guard™, response time

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at the user level becomes a valid parameter for the SLA.

Petersen's team is becoming more and more aware of what can be gained with Performance Guard: "We keep finding more and more areas in which Performance Guard™ measurements can help us deliver better service to our users. Performance measurement has proven to be a valuable supplement to our traditional System Management measurements."

Progress continues at DSB Informatik, which becomes busier and busier – except for more calls complaining about slow response times.

About CapaSystems A/S

CapaSystems A/S is a Danish company that develops software solutions that helps to ensure optimal performance on all computers while reducing the cost and effort required for administration, maintenance and support of Windows®-based clients.

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