

Challenge:

To “see” the entire SAN after moving from hub-based to switch-based environment.

Solution:

Transition from single port protocol analyzer to network-wide SNMP-based SwitchMonitor.

Result:

Lightning-fast, cost-effective SwitchMonitor finds historical trouble *before* it occurs.

Headline:

Real-time Network Monitoring Means Critical Up-Time for International Manufacturer

Body copy:

Like a company that has been given the gift of sight, Superior Industries has its eyes wide open as it produces cutting-edge portable and stationary conveyor equipment. But before installing PathSolutions’ SwitchMonitor, the international company fought an up-hill battle to gain real-time visibility into its busy Fibre Channel SAN.

The challenge for Superior Industries began when the Minnesota-based firm installed a Fibre Channel SAN with 20 Dell servers to support its 325 employees 100 dedicated on-site users and mobile sales force. Having previously relied on a protocol analyzer to understand potential network problems, MIS Manager Dave Schmidgall quickly found that he needed a more robust network analyzer to keep up with their 15 Dell switches.

“When we went from a hub to a switch environment we lost all of our visibility. Without SwitchMonitor we’d be blind,” said Schmidgall, adding that network optimization is critical to profitability. “Production is what drives our company. It’s imperative that the network stays up and running. We need to see ports reporting layer 2 errors and devices that are broadcast happy far more often than we need to see the packets.”

The Journey from Limited Visibility to Healthy History

Trying to stay up with glitches in a network they relied on 24/7 was a thankless job prior to the installation of SwitchMonitor. In fact, Schmidgall and his team had to develop a seven-step process to accomplish what now takes place seamlessly all the time.

What began as a user query quickly escalated into a series of tasks that involved setting up another port on the switch so monitoring could take place — this entailed launching a protocol analyzer. Because there was no history, technicians were forced to wait for the reported problem to repeat itself. If the difficulty still couldn’t be found on the primary database, the team would then have to look at the web server for the source of the problem.

“That method was both spotty and time consuming,” Schmidgall said. “Often times we would have to spend a day analyzing each port.”

With SwitchMonitor Schmidgall gets a picture of the entire network, not just one interface. In addition he gets visibility into the where the problem is and what is causing it.

It’s All about Maintaining a Historical Perspective

With SwitchMonitor, an ongoing history is gathered from every point on the network. “It’s like having a protocol analyzer with the added benefits of historical data and visibility of network usage with the help of a web browser,” Schmidgall said. “When we’re trouble shooting, there’s nothing more valuable than what the switch is doing historically.”

And the stakes are even getting higher at Superior, where operations are expanding to a new Prescott Valley, Arizona, facility that will employ 30 people. At that point, Schmidgall will simply utilize SwitchMonitor’s Quick Config Wizard, which will detect new switches and begin monitoring them.

Schmidgall said he is not concerned about an on-site system administrator having to be taught the complexities of SwitchMonitor. “It only takes about five minutes to learn,” he said. “None of us at Superior will ever become net experts. But that’s okay, SwitchMonitor tells us where to look.”

A Cost Effective Solution

In addition to maintaining an ongoing perspective on potential network problems, Schmidgall said he saves money by not having to purchase protocol analyzers — not to mention the two days of training required to teach his IT team to effectively use the equipment.

“As we grow it’s just a matter of adding keys,” Schmidgall said. “I don’t even know if I have a manual. I’ve never needed one.”

Growth for Superior includes the addition of VOIP, where Schmidgall said the most common problem is not the voice but the network itself and how it is functioning. Network problems can cause VOIP quality issues such as:

- Packet loss not being repaired
- Saturated links causing latency and jitter
- Over-saturated links causing packet loss

In the meantime, Schmidgall said he’s amazed that every system administrator isn’t taking advantage of SwitchMonitor. “All system administrators have the same kind of

headaches and issues,” he said. “SwitchMonitor sells itself to anyone with several years in the industry — it blows the door back open”

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