

SDS USA Case Study:

Major International Auto Manufacturer

Today, manufacturers in every industry increasingly rely on IP networks to communicate with dealers for new orders, inventory, parts, service updates, support bulletins, marketing programs, merchandising promotions, financial management, and more. The IP network has become the critical lifeline between manufacturers and their dealers. In the auto industry the dealer network is essential. The success of an auto manufacturer depends on effective IP communications with its dealer network. That's why a leading automaker turned to VIP 5.0 on z/OS from Software Diversified Services (SDS) USA to ensure the health of its IP-based dealer network in North America.

Problem: Increased Traffic and Periodic Slowdowns

The auto manufacturer has been experiencing steady growth in the use of its IP network by dealers to access a wide range of support and service functions. "I've been working for this automaker for seven years and I can't believe the growth of IP traffic," reports William Rickard, an outside consultant who manages the manufacturer's z/OS IP network.

The widespread adoption by dealers of the GUI browser and their demand for access to the company's huge DB2-based data warehouse are driving traffic growth on the IP network, a trend experienced by mainframe shops around the world. As a result of the surging volume, the dealers were increasingly encountering network slowdowns. Rickard found himself chasing down the slowdowns and bottlenecks, trying to eliminate them wherever possible. "The problem is the multiple layers of devices dealers have to go through. Sometimes that makes it difficult to even find the problem," he says.

Tracking down a problem in this environment is a slow, often frustrating challenge. It typically involves running numerous traces and pinging devices all along the network to identify which device isn't performing. The result is a costly, labor-intensive effort, and progress is slow at best.

Solution: VitalSigns for IP 5.0 on z/OS

The automaker, a dedicated mainframe shop, began looking for a way to improve the IP network management process and found the SDS VIP product family with its mainframe focus. Recently it upgraded to SDS VIP 5.0 on z/OS, a graphical network monitoring tool. VIP 5.0 enables Rickard to quickly detect, diagnose, resolve, and prevent TCP/IP problems on z/OS and OS/390 networks. VIP reports the status of applications and who is using them. Should any piece cause problems, VIP alerts him automatically. "I bring it up every day. It tells me if there is a change anywhere in the system, even if it is a change on a remote system with no VIP Agent," says Rickard.

The auto manufacturer runs VIP on a dedicated server and puts VIP Agents on its z/990 mainframe. "We have one Agent on each LPAR. We also run z/VM and z/Linux. Although VIP doesn't run on those operating systems we can still look at them and get alerts if something changes," says Rickard. The company also uses SDS's VitalSigns for VTAM (VSV), which provides comprehensive monitoring of the network, including VTAM and TCP/IP traffic, response time, and memory use for lines, controllers, applications terminals, LANs, and gateways.

Implementation of VIP 5.0 went smoothly. Rickard loaded the VIP software on a dedicated Windows server and installed VIP Agents on each z/OS LPAR, thus immediately gaining a single focal viewpoint for the monitored systems. He also chose to take advantage of VIP's optional remote host monitoring function by polling the SNMP Agents running on a number of critical servers. The small amount of additional overhead went unnoticed.

Results: See and Solve Problems Fast

VIP displays the network information graphically. "It is very easy to see where there are problems. You can see heavy traffic and identify why the traffic is so heavy," says Rickard. For this automaker the slowdowns often reflect heavy use of the data warehouse by the dealers.

Rickard particularly likes the alert feature, which sends him an email message if something has changed. That lets him fix any problem before users start calling with complaints. He also takes advantage of VIP's visual reporting. "I do a lot of graphing for management," he notes. He will generate multiple reports during the month. IT management at the automaker uses the reports to plan network capacity, particularly as the data warehouse continues to grow.

Next up for SDS is to expand the alert capabilities. Rickard expects to deploy voice paging as soon as it is ready. In the meantime, VIP 5.0 allows him to ensure that the automaker's IP network will be able to handle the increasing load.

In 2001, following a surge of interest in IP that had begun even five years before that, IBM reported that about 90% of OS/390 shops were running TCP/IP. Since then the IP surge has continued unabated, with IP emerging as a primary data center communications protocol. Even the most dedicated mainframe shops no longer rely on SNA alone. Like this automaker, they need to monitor and manage all their networks—SNA, TCP, IP—if they expect to achieve top-notch network performance. Tools like SDS VIP 5.0 and VSV make this easy to do.

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