

“Coradiant enabled us to quickly solve a problem that we were unable to fix on our own in six weeks.”

DARRELL WALKER
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INDUSTRY

Higher Education

CHALLENGE

The Instructional Technology Services team at Texas A&M needed to determine why users in its Qatar campus were experiencing very slow response times when logging on to the Blackboard application.

WHY WEB APPLICATION PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT?

A thorough network analysis uncovered no problems, yet the Blackboard application was still not working after six weeks of investigation. The team needed information regarding user sessions to troubleshoot the problem.

SOLUTION

Texas A&M installed Coradiant TrueSight IM, a complete, turnkey reporting device that detects web and server problems immediately while also providing the forensic details needed to solve them.

KEY BENEFITS

- Instantly identifies the source of end-user problems without the need for experienced network administrators
- Monitors application and server usage to audit student activity
- Monitors and troubleshoots application and server problems
- Easily administered and has excellent monitoring features



TEXAS A&M PERFORMS MONITORING AND TROUBLESHOOTING FOR ITS BLACKBOARD VISTA USERS AROUND THE WORLD WITH TRUESIGHT

Texas' first public institution of higher learning, Texas A&M University, offers more than 120 undergraduate degree programs and 240 master's and Ph.D. programs to more than 48,000 students. In addition to its flagship campus in College Station, Texas, the university has two branch campuses, one in Galveston and one in the Middle Eastern country of Qatar. Texas A&M's Instructional Technology Services team can now monitor usage and performance as well as quickly troubleshoot problems with its Blackboard course management system for users at all of these locations using Coradiant TrueSight™ Web Application Performance Management.

Texas A&M's Instructional Technology Services team administers the Web-based course management system from Blackboard, Inc. that the university employs to offer 3,651 courses at the main campus, 491 courses in Galveston, 53 courses in Qatar, 113 Health Science Center courses, and 109 continuing education and research courses—many of which are taught online. At any given time, 4,000-5,000 students might be logged onto the Blackboard system viewing online lectures, audio and video content, course material, webpages, as well as links to external websites from publishers.

After installing a new version of Blackboard, the Instructional Technology Services team began receiving complaints from the Qatar campus about extremely slow response times. Neither the application nor the infrastructure monitoring showed any problems. The university's network analysis team spent six weeks trying to resolve the issue—to no avail. Said Darrell Walker, Assistant Director of Instructional Technology Services, “Our network team did a thorough analysis to try and find the source of the problem. They looked at round-trip time, latency, packet loss—you name it. They found no problems with the network. Bandwidth was adequate. Information was getting from point A to point B. Yet the application wasn't working up

to our high standards. This became an extremely serious problem once the semester started because students were unable to access online coursework.”

It was at this time that the Instructional Technology Services team learned about Coradiant TrueSight IM (Incident Management). Said Walker, “Coradiant gave us the use of an evaluation unit. Within 30 minutes, we had the unit hooked up and configured. Immediately we saw something that didn't look right. The application would keep sending requests to download the same object. It would often take minutes before users could log on to the Blackboard application—if the application hadn't timed out or the user became frustrated with waiting. We sent screenshots from TrueSight IM documenting the problem to Blackboard. Blackboard used the TrueSight data to quickly identify a caching problem with the Blackboard Web application software. Within seven days, Blackboard customers were issued a patch that fixed the problem.”

Continued Walker, “Coradiant enabled us to quickly solve a problem that we were unable to fix on our own in six weeks. The day after we received the patch, we bought Coradiant TrueSight.”

CASE STUDY

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Texas A&M has been very pleased with TrueSight IM. Said Walker, “We like the fact that TrueSight allows us to monitor the user experience as well as application and server usage. But the biggest benefit is a greater ability to diagnose and fix problems quickly without the need for experienced network administrators on-hand at all times.”

CURRENT APPLICATIONS

Today, Texas A&M has customized TrueSight to audit student activity within its Blackboard application as well as monitor and troubleshoot other portions of its applications and infrastructure.

For example, the university uses a central authentication server. Students and faculty use a unique ID number to log on. The Instructional Technology Services team customized TrueSight IM to use that ID number as it tracks application usage. Explained Walker, “TrueSight allows us to see exactly what a user is doing in the application. For instance, many courses have online discussions, and teachers base grades on student participation. If a student complains about his participation grade, we can trace his online activity to see if the student activity is accurately represented.”

The team also uses TrueSight to monitor application and server activity. Said Walker, “I can use it to track security issues. Before final exams,

we might get a Denial of Service attack. If we see a large number of repeated requests, we can track that down. We also can look at the particular application node that the user is connected to and see the name of the server. If someone calls into our help desk, we can easily see which server is having problems.”

FUTURE APPLICATIONS

In the future, the team plans to create additional Watchpoints in TrueSight IM to monitor specific functions throughout the Blackboard application. Said Walker, “Blackboard has so many capabilities that I’d like to monitor—submitting grades, turning in homework, online discussions, file transfers and so on. For example, if a student turns in homework and the instructor doesn’t see it, we could follow the student’s threads to see whether he went to a particular server and that server had an issue during that time frame or whether he wasn’t on the system during that time.”



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ABOUT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

From humble beginnings in 1876 as Texas' first public institution of higher learning, to a bustling 5,000-acre campus with 48,000-plus students and a nationally recognized faculty, Texas A&M University is one of a select few universities with land-grant, sea-grant and space-grant designations. Texas A&M has two branch campuses, one in Galveston, Texas, and one in the Middle Eastern country of Qatar.

This research-intensive flagship university with 10 colleges was recently ranked first in the nation by *The Washington Monthly* for “tangible contributions to the public interest.” *U.S. News and World Report* ranked Texas A&M third nationally as a “best value” among public universities. Many degree programs are ranked among the top 10 in the country.

ABOUT CORADIANT

Coradiant is the leading provider of equipment used to manage, optimize and troubleshoot Web applications. Coradiant's award-winning TrueSight products use customer metrics gathered from each Web user visit as their primary data source for IT management.

Coradiant Web Application Performance Management products are deployed in hundreds of leading organizations and Fortune 500 companies including software as a service (SaaS), e-commerce, entertainment, finance, insurance, healthcare, and education.

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