



ALSTOM-EssentialNet Case Study

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I was skeptical at first, but I have to say that the [ACE Live] box definitely ‘does what it says on the tin.’ Its ability to quickly drill down to the cause of performance issues, its amazing ease of use, and the clarity of its presentation of so many useful metrics, have made it our primary tool for application performance management.”

Chris Reynolds
 UK Network Manager
 IT Centre UK
 ALSTOM

Power and Transport Worldwide

ALSTOM is a world leader in transport and energy infrastructure. One in four light bulbs in the world are powered by electricity generated by ALSTOM equipment, and the company is a leader in the field of high-speed trains and urban transportation rail systems.

ALSTOM’s UK operations comprise 40 offices linked by an MPLS WAN to its primary data center. The network supports many standard business applications, plus a number of “bespoke” applications specific to the company’s business. All these applications comprise a wide range of types: email, databases, web applications, order processing systems, and the like.

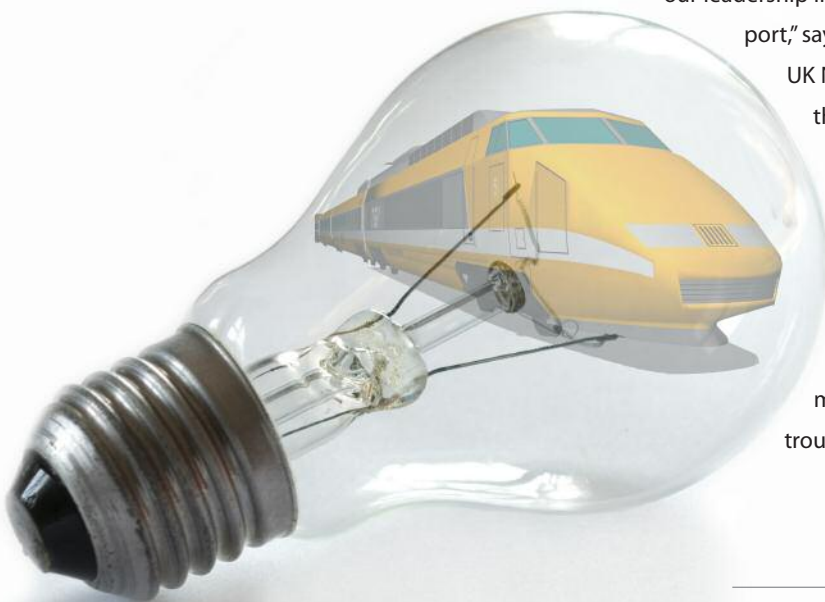
Keeping On Top Of Application Issues

“Our network is a critical part of maintaining our leadership in power and transport,” says Chris Reynolds, UK Network Manager at the company’s UK IT Centre, whose responsibilities include network planning, design, and implementation; day-to-day management and troubleshooting; and

3rd-line support. “We use a wide variety of tools to ensure that we can keep on top of critical tasks like pro-active troubleshooting of application performance problems and capacity planning. And we’re really focused on fast resolution of application issues, because our users expect the network to be there just like the electrical mains.”

In fact, Chris comments, they were so accustomed to using several different tools to address any given issue that he didn’t see any reason to consider another one. “But we heard good things about the [ACE Live] solution and how it could simplify problem-solving, so I decided to give it a try.” It helped, he notes, that the ACE Live appliance only requires a simple SPAN/mirror port connection to a primary switch (or a tap), so there was essentially no downside to evaluating it in the ALSTOM network.

An ACE Live appliance was installed at ALSTOM’s main UK data center. “It didn’t take me long to see that the [ACE Live] box definitely ‘does what it says on the tin,’” says Chris. “I was seeing a quality of data from the box that I’d not seen before, and it was pretty easy to understand—very straightforward compared to a packet decode, for instance. And it was a relief not to have to use two or three different tools to see what was going on.”



ALSTOM Problems

- Inability to quickly troubleshoot performance problems
- No real-time overview of network: who's talking to whom, what applications.
- Too much time fire-fighting, no time for new business-critical IT projects

ACE Live Solution

- An ACE Live appliance deployed in the main data center
- Monitor performance and utilization for all critical applications and links
- Real-time and historical view of wide range of application and network metrics

ALSTOM Benefits

- Much faster problem localization and resolution across entire network
- Real-time overview of network and application activity for all locations
- Extremely fast time to value, improved communication with non-technical managers
- More time for business-critical IT projects, improved IT support for business strategy

For more information,
please contact OPNET: info@opnet.com

Three-Day ROI

That ease of use convinced Chris to adopt the ACE Live appliance as a tool for basic day-to-day monitoring of the UK network. But, he says, it wasn't long before ACE Live demonstrated that it could solve problems none of the IT staff's other tools could handle.

"We started seeing a slowdown in response from our main corporate Intranet site," says Chris. "This was a major concern, as it's the company's global public face for employees, but none of the usual tools could tell us where the problem originated. The application? Server? LAN? WAN?" So he decided to work with the ACE Live appliance to see what it could tell him.

Soon, Chris tracked the problem down to the servers themselves. "Being able to rule out other parts of the infrastructure was really key to dealing with the issue."

Even more important, when the IT Centre staff tried his suggested fix, ACE Live immediately showed that his hypothesis was the right one. "The reports I generated, showing before-and-after comparisons of performance, played a major role in convincing senior directors that it was the right fix—which was a good thing, for it involved a significant expenditure." He notes that the clarity with which ACE Live shows the business impact of problems and their resolution is a big help in communications between technical staff and non-technical managers.

"Best of all," he says, "once I focused on the problem with [ACE Live], it only took about half-a-day to figure out what was going

on—that for a problem that had stalled us for several days with other tools. I'd say that overall, the time to value for the [ACE Live] purchase works out to about three days—certainly the fastest I've ever seen."

The Bottom Line

"I wouldn't hesitate to recommend that someone in a position like mine give the [ACE Live] box a try in their network," says Chris. "It's twenty times easier to use than the other tools I'm familiar with, and, at least in our situation, is the best tool I know of for dealing with application issues."

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