

Travis Perkins

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Travis Perkins plc uses Riverbed for end-user experience monitoring to deliver a superior customer experience and improve application performance

Travis Perkins plc is the UK's biggest supplier of materials to the building, construction and home improvement markets. It has 23 different businesses, operates from over 2,000 sites across the UK and employs over 28,000 people. Its customers range from DIY enthusiasts using its retail outlets such as Wickes, Tile Giant and Tool Station, right the way up to independent builders and large contractors.

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Matt Greaves
Technology Director
Travis Perkins plc

Despite being over 200 years old, the Travis Perkins Group (the Group) has a very modern approach to IT. In recent years it has invested time and resources into developing a digital strategy that will not only improve internal efficiencies, but also provide the best possible customer service for its colleagues.

Phil Wood, Head of Shared Services at Travis Perkins plc, says, “Having 23 different businesses means we’ve got 23 individual sets of requirements, with a diverse range of pain points. Our role is to understand what is important to our colleagues and customers in each business, and ensure they have the technology they need to do business effectively.”

Challenge: Monitoring is key

The Group’s digital strategy encompasses everything from introducing a next generation network that will improve connectivity between the different businesses, to migrating services to the cloud and improving core IT systems in order to make customer service easier, quicker and more accurate.

In particular, the Group needed to ensure that colleagues in every location have a consistent, high quality IT experience, from every day applications such as email to specialist applications such as the company’s new HR application. It also needed to make sure that customer-facing systems were working well, such as configuring a kitchen via the Wickes’ Vision app or using an in-store Point of Sale (PoS) unit.

In Brief

Challenges

- Improve performance monitoring, to enable problems to be identified and fixed faster
- Gain an understanding of the IT experience from the user's point of view
- Provide visibility into Internet-delivered applications, where there is no data available from the underlying infrastructure
- Join up the information from different performance metrics into one overall view

Solution

- Riverbed® SteelCentral™ Aternity for end-user experience monitoring

Benefits

- Improved user experience, by identifying and fixing issues
- Increased colleague productivity, and removed problems that could affect in-store revenue
- Cut average time to resolve problems

“It’s important for us to understand and monitor the performance of those applications, from the perspective of the user, because we might not necessarily be able to look at the underlying infrastructure,” adds Terence Thomas, Monitoring Specialist at Travis Perkins plc. “Before, we had a large set of monitoring tools, that overlapped in functionality and separate teams would purchase their own tools to do specific things, resulting in a lack of consistency and no way to achieve a ‘single pane of glass’ view.”

While the Group could look at its infrastructure for hosting applications in its data centres in order to find potential issues, the company lacked any visibility for applications delivered over the internet. For example, the Group had invested in a new company-wide, SaaS-based HR application and as part of the agreement there was a need to put in place SLAs, then monitor and report against those SLAs in relation to application performance.

The Travis Perkins Group also relies on everyday internet-based apps including Google Docs, mail and calendars.

Branch colleagues would ‘make do’ with applications such as these not functioning correctly, but the Group’s IT team had no way of monitoring them, which meant performance issues were going undetected.

“Our application stack might be showing a positive status: the databases, the hosts, the virtual networks, and the Google apps,” says Thomas. “Yet users could be experiencing poor performance, poor response times, poor web page loads, or degradation of a Google service. This could mean that colleagues were not being as productive, and could even impact order taking and payment processing; ultimately it could damage the Travis Perkins brand.”

“We were good at monitoring our infrastructure, but we didn’t know what our colleague experience was like in our branches,” says Matt Greaves, Technology Director at Travis Perkins plc. “We could look at the components, the servers, the storage, the network, the PC, individually, but we couldn’t join all of them together for a holistic view.”

Solution: Essential insights into performance

To significantly improve its monitoring, the Travis Perkins Group talked to industry analysts and vendors to investigate possible solutions and selected Riverbed® SteelCentral Aternity following a successful proof of concept. “SteelCentral Aternity can monitor the user experience of every application, running on any PC, and help diagnose and fix issues,” Thomas says. “Deployment was smooth and easy, and we worked with our application support teams to make a list of key services and user journeys to investigate first.

“Now, we have insights into the performance of our applications that we never had before,” says Thomas. “We can tell how our users are experiencing an application; we can show that from an enterprise, user and device level, and we can see where there are performance degradations and resolve them. This is incredibly valuable because it can improve our users’ productivity, and therefore remove problems interacting with customers in branches that can directly impact revenue.”

“Instead of just focusing on technology monitoring, SteelCentral Aternity gives me the view from the end-user and their experience. That’s massively important because you can have all the technology working, but if the user is not having a great experience, that’s where you can potentially lose sales and confidence in your brand.”

Phil Wood
Head of Shared Services
Travis Perkins plc

Benefits: Making the user experience right

“Historically we’ve been a ‘fix as fast as we can’ organisation,” says Greaves. “Our colleagues in branches are highly resilient with regards to IT, but this means we don’t get a lot of feedback, so it’s not easy to choose where to put our efforts.”

“What I really like about SteelCentral Aternity is it comes from the point of view of the person using the application,” says Wood. It helps the IT team to pinpoint a problem, for example, an electronic proof of delivery system not working properly, and drill down to find the issue. Once it’s resolved, the system is improved which then benefits the end-user.”

“SteelCentral Aternity has enabled us to investigate and resolve problems before colleagues even notice,” continues Greaves. “The insight that it gives us means we can invest our efforts in the most important areas, in the eyes of our colleagues, without even having to bother them.”

The Travis Perkins Group did not previously have clear visibility of what its applications’ performance should be, or what its colleagues expected. SteelCentral Aternity has enabled the IT team to create a baseline. They can then proactively monitor if the experience is getting better or worse, and improve it before it becomes painful for the end-user.

“It will be a great feedback loop into our future developments,” says Wood. “By understanding where things are failing or slowing down – be it in the application layer, the client, or the network – we can build an improvement into the next iteration.”

Instant, real-time performance dashboard

As well as dashboards that give a real-time view of performance, health and stability, the Group finds it easy to use SteelCentral Aternity to generate weekly and monthly reports, or to create ad hoc updates at a moment's notice. These provide a high-level overview and more granularity where needed. Nicky Noble, Portfolio Management Analyst at Travis Perkins plc says, "I look at the health and the User Experience Index (UXI) of each application, and create a formula to give us a percentage figure as to how well those services are performing.

"With SteelCentral Aternity, I now have data and evidence to back up what I'm saying, rather than making estimates," adds Noble. "It gives everyone confidence in the reports that we produce, and people have more enthusiasm to look at the problems, to be proactive, and to make our customer journeys as seamless as possible."

In one example, the Group rolled out a new network to all branch locations, and used SteelCentral Aternity to benchmark the pre-change experience and then measure it again, post change. This enabled the team to prove that the experience was better than it was before the rollout. Wood comments, "SteelCentral Aternity enables us to quickly understand the impact of a change, be it positive or negative, which has been a big help."

Software as a service

The company is increasingly buying software as a service solutions, which can be difficult to monitor. "By checking end-user experience with SteelCentral Aternity, we're able to hold those third-party providers to account, with the facts, rather than anecdotal stories," says Greaves.

According to Thomas, a key feature of SteelCentral Aternity is the ability to change the dimensions and look at the problem from various different angles, and then to narrow it down to a specific area. He also lists two more key features as the ability to monitor users' interactions with applications in the context of a business workflow in order to communicate performance in business terms, and the ability to analyse the overall response time of applications, by contribution by the device, server, and network.

For example, a problem can be investigated from the perspective of the user or the device, or to be analysed by location. Thomas comments, "We can quickly troubleshoot problems, and SteelCentral Aternity has improved our mean time to resolution – issues get fixed faster."

"Instead of just focusing on technology monitoring, SteelCentral Aternity gives me the view from the end-user and their experience," says Wood.

"That's massively important because you can have all the technology working, but if the user is not having a great experience, that's where you can potentially lose sales and confidence in your brand."

"Travis Perkins is in better shape today because we now have insight from SteelCentral Aternity," says Greaves. "Before, we were in the dark; now we know exactly what our colleague experience is like, out in branch and store, and we can invest our time and energy where it really matters for them to enable a positive experience for our customers."

About Riverbed

Riverbed, at more than \$1 billion in annual revenue, is the SD-WAN company, delivering the most complete platform for the hybrid enterprise to ensure multi-cloud connectivity, applications perform as expected, and performance issues can be proactively detected and resolved before impacting business performance. Riverbed enables hybrid enterprises to transform application and cloud performance into a competitive advantage by maximizing employee productivity and leveraging IT to create new forms of operational agility. Riverbed's 28,000+ customers include 97% of the *Fortune* 100 and 98% of the *Forbes* Global 100. Learn more at riverbed.com

The Riverbed logo consists of the word "riverbed" in a lowercase, bold, orange sans-serif font.