Winston & Strawn LLP

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LLP

Using Alluvio™ Aternity to quickly detect user experience issues helps Winston & Strawn keep its attorneys focused on client service—not desktop problems.

Chicago-based Winston & Strawn LLP is a global law firm with nearly 2,000 employees. For more than 160 years the firm has served as a trusted adviser and advocate for clients in virtually every industry. Among the many accolades the firm has received, the most meaningful is the continuing trust and confidence of clients.

Challenge: Monitoring the application experience from the attorney's perspective

Winston & Strawn's attorneys and staff depend on desktop applications for every phase of a case: email communications with clients, collaboration with colleagues, drafting and reviewing legal documents, and more. "If slow performance or crashes cause 1,000 attorneys to lose even five minutes of productivity a day, that's a wasted 83 hours a week—the equivalent of two full-time employees," says Mike Plichta, PC Experience Supervisor for the firm.

Monitoring application and network performance isn't enough. Even if the application itself is responsive, attorneys and staff might experience lag or crashes if a patch or Windows process misbehaves, for example.

To keep attorneys working to solve their clients' business problems—not distracted by slow applications—the Winston & Strawn IT team wanted visibility into the end user experience. Knowing the exact time and circumstances of slow performance or crashes would help pinpoint the cause, for swift remediation.

Solution: Alluvio Aternity end user experience monitoring

Winston & Strawn found its solution in Aternity. "No other end user-experience monitoring solution we've seen has anything like Aternity's dashboards," says Plichta. "When we're remediating issues, it's helpful to check what a user remembers—time of problem, frequency, activities leading up to the problem—against what actually happened."

In Brief

Challenges

- Maintain productivity for attorneys and staff by optimizing the application experience

- Quickly identify user experience problems to resolve them faster

- Monitor diverse applications running on desktops, laptops, and thin clients running Citrix Virtual Desktops

Solution

- Alluvio™ Aternity Digital Experience Management (DEM)

Benefits

- Helps IT team identify user experience issues to resolve them before attorneys and staff lose time

- Quickly identified source of slow application performance that affected nearly 500 users for 90 days

- Optimizes licensing costs by reporting application usage

- Benchmark application and operating system performance so team can evaluate new versions

Aternity runs on 2,300 devices—laptops, desktops, and thin clients running Citrix XenDesktop—belonging to partners, attorneys, and support staff in U.S., China, Hong Kong, Dubai, London, France, and Moscow. Although Aternity monitors the user experience of every app in the portfolio, for Winston & Strawn, the highest priority are Microsoft Office, Adobe Acrobat, iManage (document management system), and Workshare Compare (for comparing two version of a document).

Several teams use Aternity. Say an attorney calls the help desk to report slow Microsoft Outlook performance. To rule out simple issues, the Tier-1 support engineer checks Aternity to see the most recent reboot and application update, and Windows crashes by device model, host name, or date. If the application hasn't been rebooted recently or is out of date, the engineer can often resolve the issue on the spot.

If the issue persists, the Tier-2 support team dives in deeper. "Typically we start by checking for crash frequency and the amount of abnormal application activity," Plichta says. "Then we review user actions that lead up to crashes to narrow down the root cause."

"The first year of Aternity was amazing. It helped us solve many issues, including some we didn't know we had. Now Aternity is helping us find out about new problems right away so we can resolve them before they take away from client service."

Mike Plichta,
PC Experience Supervisor, Winston & Strawn

If a third-party application is slow or crashing, the engineering team reviews Aternity reports about crash rates and exception codes to identify faulty drivers or start vendor conversations. Application teams look to Aternity for performance data, the version installed on each desktop, and usage reports for license purchasing.

Results: Better user experience, for the best possible client service

"Since we started using Aternity the severity of troubleshooting tickets has decreased," Plichta says. "Instead of the 'blue screen of death'—a fire drill when legal teams are on a deadline—we're dealing more with nuisances like software bugs. And often we identify problems before they cause attorneys and staff to lose time."

A success story: in 2018, several applications slowed noticeably for no evident reason. Checking the Aternity device health dashboard, Plichta saw that over the past 90 days, nearly 500 users had experienced crashes of a Windows process (WMI Provider Host) that slowed performance without actually crashing the application. (Applications like Word and Acrobat use the process to request information about the device.) This information helped the team pinpoint the cause: a third-party reporting tool known for hogging CPU resources. "Blocking the third-party tool competing with a Windows process for CPU resources cut crash frequency from 1,000 a day to zero," Plichta says. "If it weren't for Aternity, I don't know how long it might have taken to find and resolve the problem."

Other benefits of Aternity for Winston & Strawn:

Reducing the risk of operating system and application updates. After installing a Windows patch, engineers view an Aternity dashboard to compare boot times before and after the patch. If they see the boot time is slower, they can revert to the previous version until the problem is resolved —staving off user complaints and lost productivity.

Easy device inventory. Aternity generates a list of all of the firms' desktop assets, the primary user, application versions—and even the last reboot. "By importing the list into Microsoft System Center Confirmation Manager we can make sure we don't miss any devices when we push new software," Plichta says. The inventory decreased crash frequency because application owners can now see which users haven't upgraded to the latest, most stable version—and send them a reminder.

Optimized license counts. By checking usage reports, application teams can make sure the firm isn't paying for more licenses than it needs.

Next steps: Monitoring mobile devices and SLA compliance

Winston & Strawn is preparing to use Aternity to monitor the user experience on the iPads some attorneys use for PDF annotation. Another plan: introducing service-level agreement (SLAs) for desktop applications and using Aternity to monitor compliance.

Plichta concludes, "The first year of Aternity was amazing. It helped us solve issues that we didn't even know we had. Now Aternity is helping us find out about new problems right away so we can resolve them before they take time away from client service."

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