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Automating BlackBerry Support Across the IT Organization

By Robert Holloway

As Director of Information Technology at international law firm Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP, my team experiences first-hand every day how much the BlackBerry smartphone has become a staple for attorneys and staff alike.

And with more than 1,000 of the devices connected to five BlackBerry Enterprise Servers in North America, Beijing and the United Kingdom, and eight Microsoft Exchange mail servers, that's a lot of people who count on us to keep them productive for the benefit of our diverse client base.

In recent years, the firm has taken steps to stabilize its mobile infrastructure by placing individual BlackBerry Enterprise Servers in regional offices; using a single, centralized SQL database and deploying Microsoft Systems Center Operations Manager to monitor messaging services.

Robert Holloway is Director of Information Technology at Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP. He and his team manage and support a global BlackBerry platform of more than 1,000 smartphones, connected to an IT infrastructure located in North America, the United Kingdom and Asia-Pacific.

MOBILITY SUPPORT CHALLENGES

But as the firm's mobile users came to rely more heavily on their smartphones, small service issues began to occur that the IT support team could not quickly isolate.

The troubleshooting process would typically begin with an inbound call to a Level 1 regional Help Desk, with the user reporting an inability to send or receive e-mail. If a simple battery pull failed to resolve the problem, the call would escalate to our Level 2 Desktop Support for additional troubleshooting before moving on to Level 3 System Administration, where the team would systematically check the user's mail server, underlying SQL database, MAPI connections, RIM SRP availability and carrier availability. Failure to resolve at this tier would lead to a final escalation to a Level 4 Infrastructure team or RIM technical support.

If all four support levels were needed, the entire troubleshooting process could last two hours or more across multiple departments. For an attorney who relies on a smartphone to help provide customer service and enhance productivity, such a lengthy time without service would be difficult to accept.

With little insight into the root cause, and faced with the prospect of recurring service issues, the IT department set out on a search for a more comprehensive solution to manage, moni-

tor and support our global BlackBerry environment, including all of the firm's mobile users.

THE SMARTPHONE SUPPORT SOLUTION

After a full competitive review, Cadwalader selected BoxTone's modular software platform, based in part on a strong recommendation from wireless manufacturer Research In Motion. Right off the bat, the IT department liked the fact that BoxTone did not require the installation of anything locally on the BlackBerry Enterprise Server that could impair performance. We also liked the intuitive nature of its Web interfaces.

Equally important was the software's ease of deployment and the comprehensive training. Run on a standard enterprise-grade Windows box, BoxTone software uses open protocols and simple read-only map drives to remotely gather from our BlackBerry Enterprise Servers up to millions of data points that are filtered, trended, graphed and stored to an embedded relationship database they support. Once deployed, BoxTone identifies all smartphone users by their Microsoft Exchange mail server, BlackBerry Enterprise Server and wireless carrier, and starts a change history for all devices under management.

End-to-end platform visibility improved on Day One. The BoxTone Services team was also extremely knowledgeable. They explained the

installation — what each module and console does — and then called a few days later to make sure all was working properly. Since initial deployment, our operations team reports that software patch upgrades have taken only 30 minutes.

HOW CADWALADER AUTOMATES BLACKBERRY SUPPORT

Following installation of BoxTone software, we quickly moved to automate Level 1-4 BlackBerry support.

Regional Help Desk personnel, including the largest Help Desk at the firm's New York City headquarters, were trained in the use of the BoxTone Service Desk module, enabling them to find and fix — or intelligently escalate — most inbound support calls in three minutes or less.

The firm's System Administration team began to use BoxTone's Incident and Problem Management modules to proactively find, fix and validate a wide variety of service issues, including BES load issues, carrier unavailability or even a dead battery, and to identify, isolate and resolve chronic issues, such as hung threads, across our BlackBerry infrastructure.

Our Telecom Group turned to BoxTone's Asset, Expense & Compliance Management module to replace cumbersome spreadsheets previously used to inventory devices and rationalize carrier expenses.

Thanks to BoxTone software, the System Administration team has substantially reduced the need to troubleshoot. Alerts tell them what service issues are happening; where and why. The team has used BoxTone to inform our carrier providers that wireless services are down — and have known when services have returned to normal well before carrier communiqués arrive. The team especially appreciates that BoxTone alerts are specific

and easily understood. If the BES SQL database cannot be accessed, they want to be told just that specifically, and BoxTone does.

We also rely on the BoxTone Remote Console, a handheld IT administrator view of individual, group and infrastructure performance that enables IT support personnel, when outside the office, to identify service issues and either execute the fix or delegate the fix to the appropriate staff member.

THE RESULTS

Benefits have accrued at every level of the Cadwalader IT organization.

With BoxTone, Help Desk escalations have decreased 60%-80%. The System Administration team used to get upwards of 20 calls per week, often learning of service issues from the users themselves, and lacking a good answer on the resolution needed. Now,

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the vast majority of those calls are resolved by the Help Desk. Using their BoxTone consoles, every support tier knows an issue and its root cause, can fully brief (if needed) the smartphone user and, when authorized, execute the fix.

BoxTone has also enabled the firm to experience significant data plan and device savings. BoxTone reports identify for us low and no-use BlackBerry smartphones over 30-, 60- and 90-day periods. When we first saw these reports and realized units were sitting unused, we immediately initiated a process to reassign them to others.

Automated aggregation of smartphone inventory information has saved the Telecom Group hours spent assembling less-comprehensive spreadsheets. But carrier expense rationalization has been the standout. Often when a carrier bill arrives, it lists only a phone number and the minutes expended. But our Telecom Group needs to know the smartphone owner as well — especially when the user's allocated data plans have been exceeded.

A STANDOUT MOMENT

One particular incident involving BoxTone stands out more than others.

One of our U.S.-based attorneys went to Hungary on business. After landing, he called our Help Desk to report that his BlackBerry was not working. My team instantly turned to BoxTone, which confirmed that the user's plan had not been established with the carrier. The Telecom Group called the carrier and less than 30 minutes later, the plan was in place. If not for BoxTone, the situation could have easily escalated into user dissatisfaction and a time-consuming troubleshooting exercise — potentially costing the firm money and my team valuable credibility.

No IT organization enjoys being caught in reactive mode. If mobility is mission critical to your firm, consider automating support, making sure any solution you choose can accommodate the unique visibility and reporting needs of all stakeholders who touch the platform.