

GSK Biologicals: end-to-end monitoring

Since May 2007 GlaxoSmithKline Biologicals has been preventing degradation of the service level in some fifteen countries in Europe, North America and Asia, by tracking key transactions through the network to the user.

“The system is slow!” This issue remains no more than an impression, especially if the individual monitoring tools of that system’s components are showing only green lights... Jean-Claude Nicolas, Director IT Operations at GSK Biologicals, the GSK group’s world vaccine R&D and production centre: “We were looking for a tool that would anticipate progressive deterioration of an environment, even before a user told us about it – using objective measurement of response times of our mainstay applications, from ERP to the document management system, working through the portal and always putting ourselves in the shoes of the user whose views we are simulating.” Increasing globalisation, which involves more complex environments, has also played its part: “We must be able to measure the response times on all the sites that have users of our applications, whether they are managed by GSK Biologicals IT department or by that of the GSK group. Thus we had to be able to select a tool, whose deployment does not need any specific skills on remote sites.”

Pragmatism

Since PoC, the duo of Steria and the Nimbus platform (by Nimsoft), has looked good: “The project worked at once, easily. Furthermore the Steria project manager was very responsive. Since then, his know-how has always been invaluable as he points out things that need checking which I wouldn’t necessarily have thought of. He comes in two days a week, and the fact that he also works in Steria’s data centre, which is another Nimbus user, has favourable repercussions for us”, Jacques Vilain, instigator of the end-to-end monitoring,

and in charge of the Nimsoft platform stresses. In his eyes, the cost of the solution, much less than that of its competitor tested at the time of the PoC, reflected GSK Biologicals’ pragmatic approach. “We don’t want to get involved in some kind of mega-project that takes several months analysis before you start.” After 10 applications in Rixensart and Wavre, international roll-out took place on all GSK Biologicals sites and some GSK sites. “The product is flexible, it was possible to install the probes using our standard deployment methods. The local IT manager simply supplies us with a standard ‘GSK Bio’ configured laptop”, Jacques Vilain concludes.

Proaction is better than reaction

“Several times the monitoring console has revealed slow-downs that we have reported to the second level teams specialising in the relevant environment, who have been able to identify the cause”, exults Jean-Claude Nicolas. Even before a new version

of a business application was deployed on some forty sites, his manager asked for its performance to be measured: “We added 10 probes, which looked at the response times for 15 days before going on to the next site. If there was a problem, the machine stayed for another fortnight, time for our network team and the local IT contacts to take the action needed”, explains Jacques Vilain, happy to have been able to contribute to a change without any nuisance to users, and having “initiated objective talks and helped to parameterise the network components managed by the group using hard data.” GSK Biologicals still intends to model the Nimsoft dynamic dashboard in order to use it for both monitoring, and the design of all new systems. “This will act as a self-regulating mechanism in the change management process: if you use it to monitor the system, it will make you think carefully about any change, since any error or omission in updating will result in an alarm”, concludes Jean-Claude Nicolas.



Jean-Claude Nicolas, Director IT Operations (right): “Steria is not invasive, but keeps listening so as to provide simple but powerful solutions that suit us.” (Left: Jacques Vilain, project leader at GSK Biologicals. Middle: Joël Ingels, Steria’s project manager)