ExtraHop Helps DDI Build a Leading IT Operation

Case Study: Development Dimensions International

"ExtraHop gives us the visibility we need to be smarter, faster, and more data-driven about our current operations, and keeps us focused on the future."

— Jake Whitlock, Network Engineer, Development Dimensions International

The Beginning

Founded in 1970, Development Dimensions International (DDI) now operates 42 offices in 26 countries, providing the world's top organizations—including half of the Fortune 500—with leadership assessment and development training. Their web-based testing and assessment applications are used weekly in more than 90 countries, helping DDI clients make upwards of 3,200 hiring decisions every hour. Since the company's founding, it has successfully screened more than 20 million candidates.

"When the world's leading companies rely on your applications to inform their hiring and other personnel decisions, performance problems or latency materially impact the pace and efficiency of business," says Jake Whitlock, Network Engineer for DDI. For Jake and the rest of the IT team at DDI, keeping the assessment and testing applications up and running and ensuring connectivity for their globally distributed operations are mission critical.

While application performance and availability are at the core of the IT team's mission, it's not the only consideration. According to the Global Corporate Training Market 2015-2019 report from Sandler Research, the corporate training market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 8.77% from 2014-2019. That growth means those applications need to scale up.

"It's not enough for IT to support the business as it exists today. Everything that we do—from the technologies we purchase to the applications and features we design—must be done in the context of where our business will be in three to five years," says Jake. "We have to anticipate the scale, complexity, and demand of the future. If we succeed in that, our customers—and DDI—win."

Company Profile

Development Dimensions International (DDI) is a global human resources consultancy specializing in leadership assessment and development. Their global operations serve clients in 26 countries, including half of the Fortune 500.

The Beginning

With a suite of web-based assessment applications at the core of its global operations, DDI needed a way to quickly evaluate and resolve performance problems before they impact customer experience and outcomes.

The Transformation

IT analytics from ExtraHop give the team at DDI accurate and timely visibility from the network all the way through end-user experience, helping them proactively identify and address business-impacting performance issues.

The Benefits

- Better visibility supports key future-proofing initiatives
- Unbiased insight reduced troubleshooting times from weeks to hours
- Real-time analytics help IT proactively support end-user digital experience

The Transformation

With dual mandates around end-user experience and future-proofing, the IT organization at DDI needed a way to gain accurate and timely insight that would get them to root cause and resolution faster. They found it in ExtraHop.

Identifying a Leader

When it came to IT monitoring tools, the IT team at DDI was used to solutions that only offered visibility into a narrow slice of the infrastructure. That meant trying to manually correlate log data with the views they were getting from point solutions.

"With ExtraHop, we very quickly realized that we could see much more than just HTTP," says Jake. "For the first time, we could visualize both the end-user experience and corresponding performance issues across the infrastructure in a single UI. It brought everything into focus."

Slow Connection to China

The first challenge that Jake and his team threw at ExtraHop was an application latency issue that customers were experiencing at their assessment centers in China. The ExtraHop account team helped them spin up a virtual appliance at a remote site in China. They were quickly able to dig into user sessions to understand both end-user experience and the back-end performance impacting it.

The Benefits

Focusing on the Future

With the accurate and timely insight provided by ExtraHop, Jake and the DDI team spend less time troubleshooting and resolving performance problems and more time focused on building applications and infrastructure that will help the company and its customers thrive. The team has plans to migrate applications to Microsoft Azure, and the company is using SaaS offerings like Office365 to improve operations and productivity.

From Weeks to Hours

In one notable instance, one of the testing applications started getting hit with synthetic transactions coming in from China roughly every two hours, slowing down the entire application.

"The development team couldn't figure out what was happening. They could see the calls, but had no way to determine the source," said Jake. "After two weeks or so, one of them brought it to our team. We dug into it with ExtraHop. Within a day, we not only figured out where the calls were coming from, but we helped them shut it down. With ExtraHop, our whole team spends more time building and less time fixing."

Ensuring Digital Experience

DDI recently migrated its internal email traffic to Office365, and Jake and his team built a dashboard to monitor the traffic, then shared it with stakeholders across the IT organization. Upon seeing the data, a server admin immediately realized that one of the two servers used to communicate with Office365 was still in maintenance mode, leaving email and services vulnerable to significant performance impacts and shutdowns.

"With the visibility ExtraHop provided, we got the server back into production right away, before it affected employees. Without that dashboard, we wouldn't have known there was a problem until an end-user complained."

A Gateway to Faster operations

The IT team at DDI recently embarked on the second phase of their email transition, retiring four Symantec messaging gateways. The first step in retiring the devices was to identify the IP addresses communicating over the gateways and match them to specific emails.

"Without ExtraHop, this task would have been entirely manual and nearly impossible. We would have been sorting through server and application logs and manually correlating that to the gateway logs, which were notoriously unreliable," says a Systems Engineer at DDI.

Using ExtraHop, the systems engineer was able to instantly pull every IP address that talked to each gateway over the past six months, saving more than 100 hours of his time. And because the traffic ExtraHop monitors is passively observed, the systems engineer trusted its accuracy.

Says the systems engineer: "To be frank, this project would have sucked without ExtraHop."