

Proactive Realtime Environmental Management Protects Productivity and Service Continuity

Summary

Insurance group Royal & SunAlliance has implemented a realtime environmental management system to monitor and control threats to its business critical communications network. The REM Enterprise solution allows the company to be proactive in dealing with risks and avoiding failures. It provides a sensor topology mapped to each individual element of the communications estate. Monitoring data is fed to a dedicated server that analyses thresholds and issues alerts to a Web interface, by SMS and email notifications, and as SNMP data to third-party partner systems. REM Enterprise was developed by REM Probe Ltd as a hardware agnostic network appliance, capable of integrating with any monitoring and information management infrastructure. Since installing the solution, Royal & SunAlliance has enhanced collaboration between system integrator and facilities management partners, reduced lost revenues caused by communications failures, protected staff productivity in its call centres and improved the continuity of its customer services.

Situation

Royal & SunAlliance is one of the world's leading insurance groups. Operating in 130 countries, it serves 20 million customers with insurance products through a number of well known brands, including the UK direct arm MORE TH>N.

As part of a recent business transformation initiative to secure the company's leading position in the market, Royal & SunAlliance took the opportunity to enhance the IT infrastructure and communications network that deliver business services to the company's UK offices.

Steve Allen is IS Project Manager, Technology Projects, for Royal & SunAlliance. He emphasises the importance of the business communications network within the company's business infrastructure, "The success of our business depends upon the thousands of transactions transmitted across the network each minute of every day. Any interruption, even only for a few moments, can cause serious financial loss and threaten the company's reputation with its customers. It is vitally important that we are aware of any environmental threats that might jeopardise the equipment involved."

Major communications failures in the company's call centres are among the most serious of threats. In the Royal & SunAlliance Sunderland call centre, for example, such an event would result in 500 insurance advisers being unable to answer phone calls, process claims and provide quotations. In

Allen's estimation, "If it takes three or four hours to resolve such a problem, we could lose 2000 business-hours and the income they would have generated."

The environmental causes of equipment failures include fire, heat, humidity, leaks and power loss. Early warning of these threats shortens recovery times and can often avoid the problem altogether.

While Royal & SunAlliance have implemented some monitoring solutions in the past, they were capable of providing only a fragmented view of the environment. Allen explains, "Information from sensors within air conditioning systems was entirely separate from alarms triggered by leak detection sensors. Alerts were only received once a problem had occurred and knowledge of each was restricted to the operators of the individual systems or the security staff at the specific site involved."

In these circumstances, co-ordination and sharing information with integration services and facilities management partners often extended the time required to resolve problems, which only served to increase the inconvenience to customers.

Allen recalls, "We realised we needed a means of monitoring our entire estate and combining all the sensor data into one view of the whole environment. To allow us to be proactive in dealing with environmental threats to our IT systems we wanted to be able to predict failure, rather than wait for it to happen, and share environmental intelligence with our integration and facilities management services partners such as IBM and BT."

Solution

Having identified the issues, Royal & SunAlliance met with REM Probe Ltd to discuss the options. The vision was a scalable solution that would provide a single view of the whole communications environment and be capable of adapting to a changing estate. It needed to be a standardised solution, which could be implemented at any R&SA site to allow a phased roll-out across the business.

As Kelvin Ager, Managing Director at REM Probe Ltd, confirms, "Royal & SunAlliance has many offices in the UK, each connected by a wide area network, and the solution we provided had to be able to traverse this network. During the survey phase we worked with Royal & SunAlliance to design a monitoring topology that included sites across UK."

Planning began with the analysis of environmental statistics taken over time from each Royal & SunAlliance communications room. The results were used to set the local alert threshold values within which the equipment in each room could operate safely. The objective was to establish levels of alert

that would give sufficient warning to allow operators to identify and resolve issues before failure occurred.

For Steve Allen, predicting problems was an essential requirement, “A key component for us was the ability to trend. We wanted a solution that could analyse sensor metrics over days and weeks to identify stability, deterioration or improvement in the environment. This would allow us to concentrate our resources and efforts in responding to and extinguishing threats.”

Alerts are only effective if delivered quickly to those able to deal with them; their rapid and accurate communication was another essential requirement for Royal & SunAlliance. “We need to know immediately when an alert had been generated,” Steve Allen confirms. “The REM Enterprise solution automatically notifies key personnel, and our service provider and systems integration partners.”

At the heart of the Royal & Sun Alliance solution is a sensor estate carefully tailored to monitor the unique environment of each element of the communications network. Allen explains, “Data from sensors is sent every two minutes to the REM server within our datacentre. The REM server analyses thresholds and issues alerts to the Web interface, through SMS and email notifications, and as SNMP data to our partners, including BT in the UK and IBM in Bangalore.”

Steve Allen is impressed by the level of service delivered by the REM team. “From the moment we started working with REM Probe Ltd we realised the company is completely customer focused. The team listened intently to our needs and reflected our specific requirements in the solution they delivered. We could not have asked for anything more from REM, they have been very responsive.”

For Kelvin Ager, working closely with customers means adapting to all their business needs, “The REM team worked directly with Royal & SunAlliance facilities management teams to fulfil all their formal processes and documentation requirements, including risk assessments and method statements for each installation at each site. We provide such support to help our customers’ project managers keep implementations to schedule and risk free.”

Steve Allen confirms the REM team’s success, “From an end-customer perspective, REM ticked all the boxes for Royal & SunAlliance. They provided an excellent design phase and the installation was fast with no disruption to our business. They met all our requirements and delivered on time and in budget.”

Benefits

Ensures business continuity, protecting key customer services

With business processes developing in complexity and Royal & SunAlliance becoming ever more dependent upon technology to deliver them, it is paramount that the systems involved deliver uninterrupted service. As Steve Allen confirms, REM Enterprise is playing an essential part in protecting Royal & SunAlliance's core business by ensuring this remains the case.

He says, "The stability of our systems was an essential requirement. In particular, ensuring the continuous availability of our More Th>n web site, now so central to the success of our business, was a key driver for this project. We wanted to make sure that if it failed we knew immediately what the problem was and how to resolve it. The REM solution has ensured we have bolstered the protection of the key components of our business processes."

Minimises lost revenues, delivering fast ROI

With the potential costs of lost business accruing at £1000s per minute, threats to the Royal & SunAlliance communications network are taken very seriously. REM Enterprise delivers measurable, quantifiable benefits to the business each time an alert helps avoid a problem escalating. In its first year of operation at Royal & SunAlliance, the system identified and avoided two major potential threats to the company's communications network.

Steve Allen is in no doubt about the value of the REM Enterprise solution, "At the start of the project we considered how we could quantify the business benefits and, consequently, the ROI of the REM Enterprise solution. We quickly realised that by preventing only one or two failures the financial benefits to us and the service continuity benefits to our customers would very quickly cover the costs of the system."

Facilitates collaboration, accelerating resolution

Co-ordination with system integrator and facilities management partners can be a cause of delay when problems occur. As Kelvin Ager explains, the REM Enterprise solution is helping Royal & SunAlliance avoid this, "By providing alert notification to third parties, REM Enterprise helps prevent disputes and facilitates collaboration between partners to achieve the early resolution of potential threats without the unnecessary involvement of Royal & SunAlliance staff."

Steve Allen confirms the benefit, "REM Enterprise helps identify the cause of an alert straight away, whether it is a problem with the network, a server or the facilities. This eradicates confusion between partners that might otherwise delay resolution. Now they can respond immediately to protect our business services with the right person to resolve the issue, ensuring a fast, first time fix."

Minimises business-hours lost, protecting productivity and service to customers

Having avoided two major potential incidents in the first year, when a failing air conditioning unit was discovered and the source of a power failure identified, REM Enterprise has already made a significant contribution to business continuity at Royal & SunAlliance. However, identifying and helping to resolve both risks before the start of the working day delivered further advantage by protecting productivity and service to customers.

As Steve Allen confirms, this is an important benefit, “REM Enterprise proactive monitoring has increased the number of incidents detected during night time hours by 45 percent. The ability to fix problems out of hours minimises business-hours lost and maximises the productivity of call centre staff in terms of sales and customer support.”

Enhances physical security, reducing threats to service integrity

The REM Enterprise solution also provides the ability to monitor and control physical access to equipment. Kelvin Ager explains, “We help Royal & SunAlliance control access to network racks with remote control of cabinet doors and electronic key fobs. In addition, we have created zones with specific time controls limiting access hours.”

Steve Allen adds, “We also took an option to install a CCTV IP camera in each of our communications rooms. These cameras allow us to instantly record images of any cabinet from which a forced access alert is received. This equipment has also proved very useful in neutralising risks at unmanned sites. In a recent example, a flood risk was confirmed by IP camera and appropriate facilities management staff were directed to the site much faster as a consequence.”

Delivers proactive response, controlling risk and avoiding failure

Before the REM Enterprise solution began monitoring the Royal & SunAlliance communications network, the operations staff could only react to problems once they had occurred. Now, thanks to the insight the REM Enterprise solution provides into the status of the network and the escalating alerts it delivers, staff can be proactive in responding to issues, reducing risk and avoiding failures.

“The REM Enterprise solution provides us with all we need to understand our environment. We can alert when faults occur and rectify them as quickly as possible,” says a delighted Steve Allen. “Without this system we would struggle to provide the service our customers have come to expect and rely upon. REM Enterprise simplifies and accelerates the management of our systems, leaving us more time to concentrate on our core business objectives of providing better levels of service to customers and increasing revenues.”

Contact

For more information about the REM Enterprise solution: call REM Probe Ltd on **+44 (0) 1252 352280**