



CASE STUDY | FINANCE

Digital Outsource Services

How the team catch database deployment problems with Redgate SQL Monitor



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Theresa Boonzaaier, Senior DBA, Digital Outsource Services

How Digital Outsource Services' DBA team catch deployment problems

Digital marketing and customer relationship management agency Digital Outsource Services (DOS) use Redgate's SQL Monitor to track 24 of their production SQL Servers. As a result:

- The database administrators save 15 hours a week compared to checking server performance by hand.
- The database team are the first to know about any server performance problems.

The background

Theresa Boonzaaier is a Senior DBA at DOS, a digital marketing and customer relationship management agency.

Boonzaaier took the company from having no monitoring on their servers at all, to a comprehensive monitoring setup with automated alerts, using Redgate's SQL Monitor. Now the team can spot performance problems before they become server outages.

The team is responsible for the 27 production SQL Servers at DOS. "We store operational and aggregated data for our clients and we have quite a big BI team that delivers reporting. So we've got quite a bit of data in our company," Boonzaaier explains.

Their large BI and in-house development teams deploy software to the servers – but when deployments don't go smoothly, the DBA team have to be ready...

First steps into monitoring

When Boonzaaier joined the company's DBA team nine years ago, server monitoring was a distant dream. "No one was looking at performance of the servers at all, except when there was a problem," she recalls.

They briefly used a third-party server monitoring tool, but found it was "almost too much" for their needs. Boonzaaier instead began work on a home-grown monitoring system that used PerfMon counters and hand-written SQL scripts.

This manual system had no reliable alerting mechanism to let them know when things went wrong. Instead, they had a daily three-hour ritual to check every server, examine the monitoring data, and make sure everything was as it should be.

"It was a problem because you had a physical script running on every single server, and when the server was rebooted you had to start it up again", remembers Boonzaaier. "If your server was rebooted by IT we wouldn't know, and for long periods of time you didn't have any performance monitoring. Then suddenly you have a problem on the server, only you didn't have any monitoring information."

Leaving manual monitoring behind

Recognising that their monitoring situation was costing them 15 hours a week, Boonzaaier decided to look again at monitoring software.

After testing half a dozen tools for performance and ease-of-use, they chose SQL Monitor.

Compared to the monitoring tools the company had used in the past, Boonzaaier concluded “SQL Monitor had everything that we needed, and was also much more affordable.”

The DBA team uses SQL Monitor to keep an eye on 24 of their 27 servers. With so many servers to monitor, they needed a tool that let the team see all of them in one place: “With SQL Monitor, everything is collected in one database and we connect to all the servers from the one interface. It lets us see everything visually from one central point of view,” says Boonzaaier.

They were also able to replace the more bespoke functionality of their home-grown monitoring system with SQL Monitor’s custom metrics feature: adding their own metrics for checking data replication, watching log file growth, and making sure DBCC was being run.

15 minute fix for bad deployment

One weekday evening the company deployed some new software, an online game, onto one of their servers.

Boonzaaier checked the Analysis graph in SQL Monitor just after the deployment, and noticed the server was being hit hard: “As soon as we’d deployed it, the CPU usage had gone from 20% to 80%.”

They set the time range in SQL Monitor to the past 24 hours and went to the Top 10 Expensive Queries report. This showed them which queries had been taking up the most processing time since the deployment.

They discovered the culprit was a single badly-written query, originating from the recently deployed application. They were able to go to the development team with the data, and after rewriting the query, CPU usage on the server dropped back down to 20%. “It took us probably 15 minutes to pinpoint the problem,” says Boonzaaier.

For Boonzaaier, an early warning system was essential for catching deployment problems: “If we didn’t have SQL Monitor, we wouldn’t have noticed it until we deployed the next thing on that server, and all of a sudden the server would have flatlined.”

Ready for anything

The DBA team can now confidently catch performance problems as soon as they happen, and no longer have to spend hours manually collecting monitoring data. Says Boonzaaier, “I would definitely recommend SQL Monitor. What you’re looking for is right there in one place. It’s easy to set up, easy to get used to and it really does save time.”



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