



Overview

Country or Region: Hong Kong SAR
Industry: Utilities

Customer Profile

Hong Kong-based iCare.com Limited is an Internet service provider offering a variety of services from Internet access to e-mail and online shopping.

Business Situation

To serve existing subscribers who depend on its services, iCare.com Limited wanted to fine-tune the configuration of its mission-critical Microsoft® Exchange Server-based messaging system.

Solution

iCare.com used the Microsoft Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer Tool to examine and analyze its Exchange Server systems and optimize its overall messaging solution.

Benefits

- Time savings
- Increased productivity
- Quick problem resolution
- Ease of use

ISP Reduces Time for System Management Task by 99 Percent Using Analyzer Tool

“We were amazed at how easy BPA is to use and how friendly the user interface is.... The reports and technical articles make it very easy for us to identify and resolve issues.”

K.M. Chiu, Systems Project Manager, iCare.com

Hong Kong-based iCare.com Limited is an Internet service provider (ISP) offering subscribers a broad range of services, including Internet access services, e-mail, and online shopping. In 2003, iCare.com began using Microsoft® Solution for High Volume Exchange, a solution based on Microsoft Exchange 2000 Server. Looking for a way to optimize its solution, iCare.com downloaded and ran the Microsoft Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer Tool (BPA). It took just 15 minutes to gather, analyze, and report on data on all Exchange servers. This was 99 percent faster than the previous average of three hours per server to manually accomplish the same task. iCare.com found Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer to be so useful that the company runs it routinely as part of its monthly operating processes to troubleshoot any critical incidents.

When we first suggested running BPA, the IT group didn't really know what to expect and wasn't sure the tool would help. But after seeing the tool in action, they were convinced of its value."

Jerman Ng, Infrastructure Rapid Response Engineer for the Global Technical Support Center, Microsoft

Situation

Founded in August 2000, iCare.com is the first public utility in Hong Kong to provide its citizens integrated Internet services. Through the company's Web portal, subscribers have Internet access services, e-mail, and can shop online. In late 2001, iCare.com introduced Internet direct dialing and, in early 2002, added broadband to its list of services. A goal of iCare.com is to help make Hong Kong a knowledge-based society through the services it provides.

Since 2003, the messaging solution at iCare.com.com has been Microsoft® Solution for High Volume Exchange, a product based on Microsoft Exchange 2000 Server, which is part of Windows Server System™ integrated server software. The solution runs on multiple servers located in the iCare.com data center. With thousands of subscribers depending daily on the iCare messaging system, providing superior, reliable, uninterrupted service is critical to the company's success. To achieve this standard, iCare.com relies on Microsoft Services Premier Support for round-the-clock assistance in managing its messaging solution.

The iCare.com IT group was pleased with its Exchange Server messaging solution, but it wanted to optimize the solution and improve load balancing on the servers. For example, the group wanted a way to route subscriber e-mail messages and Exchange Server system messages to different servers. It also wanted to fine-tune its Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) settings to accommodate a high volume of connections—a primary requirement for any Internet service provider. Optimizing the solution would require changing some of the default Exchange Server configuration settings. But without diagnostic tools or specific guidelines for optimization, the group was hesitant to make changes. It wanted assurance from its Microsoft Services support team that the

changes could be adequately tested and would not adversely affect subscriber services.

Solution

In June 2005, Microsoft Services suggested that iCare.com run a health check on the entire Exchange Server topology using the Microsoft Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer Tool. It is a free, downloadable tool for Exchange Server users that automatically examines and collects data for more than 1,500 settings from the Active Directory® service, the registry, and other data repositories on all Exchange Server systems in a deployment. It then compares the data to an XML rules file to determine whether the configuration settings meet Microsoft best practices. Each time Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer is run, it automatically detects and downloads updates to the XML rules file, which contains more than 1,500 best-practice rules. IT departments use Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer to judge the general health of Exchange Server topologies and troubleshoot specific problems.

The first time the iCare.com IT group downloaded and ran Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer, it collected, analyzed, and reported on data from all Exchange Server systems. The report, which contained fewer than 30 entries for all Exchange servers, gave the IT group access to information that had previously been very difficult to gather manually. Revealing no serious issues with the Exchange Server systems, the report included a list of current Exchange Server settings, which provided the group with a baseline for comparison. It also included information about open objects, services that were stopped, and various hardware and memory settings. Each entry was linked to the Microsoft Exchange Server TechCenter, which the group found to be extremely helpful.

Figure 1 - Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer reports are linked to Exchange TechCenter knowledgebase articles.

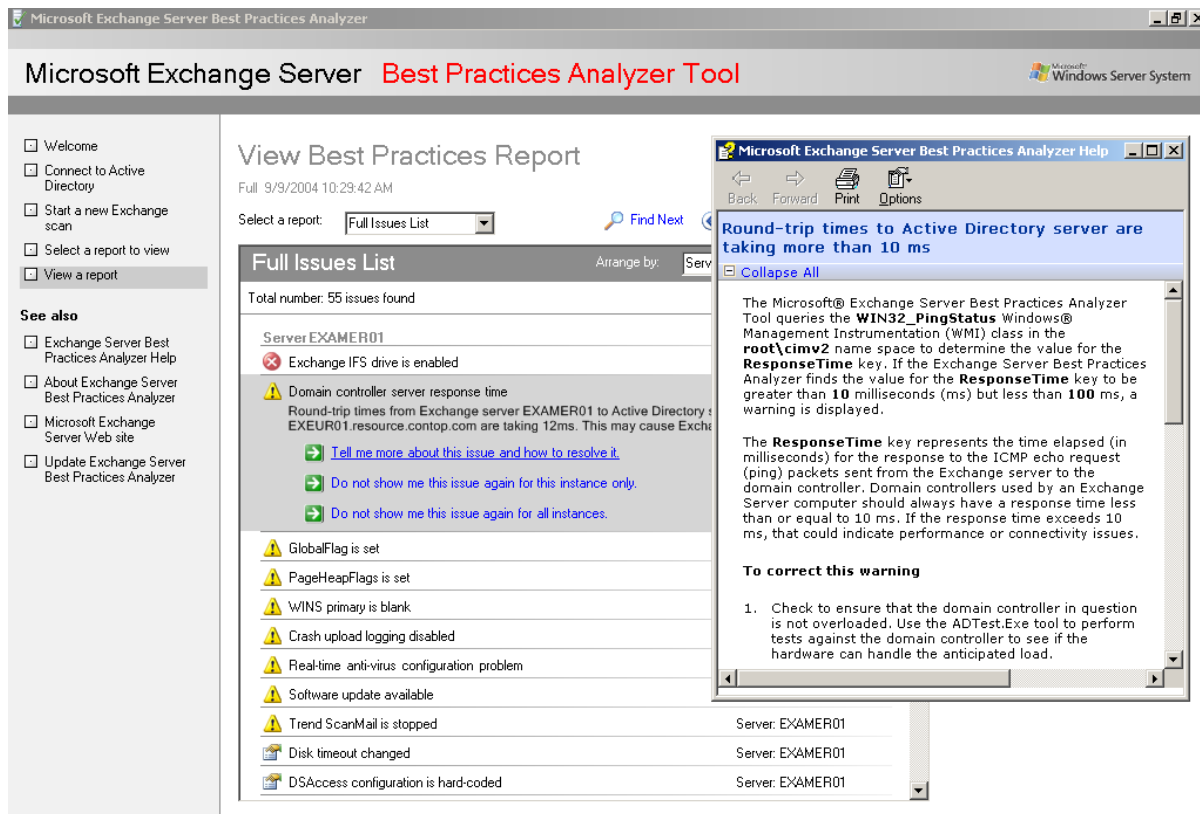
The Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer (BPA) team at Microsoft has written more than 1,200 dedicated knowledgebase articles. "We realized that system administrators wanted more than just a few sentences to help them resolve issues," says Paul Bowden, Program Manager for the U.S. Exchange Server Customer Experience Team at Microsoft. "The 'tell me more' link for each reported issue describes how Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer detected the problem, where the data came from, the symptoms and severity of the problem, and provides step-by-step instruction for resolving the issue," says Bowden (see Figure 1).

"When we first suggested running BPA, the IT group didn't really know what to expect and wasn't sure the tool would help. But after

seeing the tool in action, they were convinced of its value," says Jerman Ng, Infrastructure Rapid Response Engineer for the Global Technical Support Center at Microsoft. Since June, the group has been using Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer for routine monthly maintenance. The group has also been using the tool to help troubleshoot critical issues as they arise.

Benefits

The IT group at iCare.com has found Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer to be an invaluable tool that is easy to use, saves time, and increases the group's productivity. Equally important, it allows the group to resolve problems quickly and thereby provide reliable service, which is paramount to the company's success.



“With BPA, we are able to collect Exchange Server information and identify the root cause of the problem very quickly...and that makes our customers very happy.”

Jacky Lo, Infrastructure Rapid Response Engineer for the Global Technical Support Center, Microsoft

Time Savings

Before the IT group at iCare.com began using Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer, it could take a system administrator one to two hours to collect Exchange Server data from just one server. It would take another one to two hours to compile, analyze, and report on the data—together, an average of three hours per Exchange Server system per month. Multiplied by the number of servers, a system administrator could spend 40–50 hours per month just monitoring the health of Exchange Server systems. For iCare, using Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer has reduced the total time to just 10–15 minutes. That amounts to a 99 percent reduction in time spent on routine maintenance tasks.

Increased Productivity

Saving 40–50 hours per month amounts to reclaiming 30 percent of one system administrator’s time—a significant savings by any standard. That recovered time contributes directly to increased productivity in the iCare.com IT group: system administrators now have more time to devote to other high-priority IT tasks.

Quick Problem Resolution

The IT group at iCare.com strives to resolve technical issues quickly so that subscribers have uninterrupted service. But technical issues can be resolved quickly only when system administrators have effective tools. For the IT group, Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer has proven itself invaluable for troubleshooting. “When we are fire-fighting a critical issue, such as a problem sending or receiving e-mail, time is extremely important,” says Jacky Lo, Infrastructure Rapid Response Engineer for the Global Technical Support Center at Microsoft. “With BPA, we are able to collect Exchange Server information and identify the root cause of the problem very quickly. This is far better than for us to investigate manually every single setting in every server, which can take many

hours. Using BPA, we can solve a problem in a very short time, and that makes our customers very happy.”

Ease of Use

With its graphical user interface, clearly structured reports, and links to technical information, Exchange Server Best Analyzer couldn’t be simpler for IT departments to use. It requires little or no training. “We were amazed at how easy BPA is to use and how friendly the user interface is,” says K.M. Chiu, Systems Project Manager of iCare.com. “We were also surprised at how well integrated the reports are with Microsoft Exchange Server TechCenter articles. The reports and technical articles make it very easy for us to identify and resolve issues,” says Chiu.

The IT group at iCare.com also appreciates the comprehensive onscreen view of the server topology that Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer provides. An administrator can click any server name to get detailed information about that server. If a hard-copy report is needed, an administrator can easily print the report or export the data to an XML, HTML, or CSV file. When the group needs to elevate an incident to Microsoft Services, it can easily forward relevant information from a report to the engineering team.

The IT group at iCare.com is so impressed with Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer that it has incorporated it into the company’s regular monthly maintenance schedule and operating processes. For the future, the group is considering using the Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer Management Pack for MOM 2005 together with Microsoft Operations Manager (MOM) 2005, a real-time operations management solution. With the management pack, Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer can be configured to run automatically under the MOM agent on each server and send configuration alerts through the MOM console.

For More Information

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For more information about iCare.com Limited products and services, call (852) 2232 1888 or visit the Web site at: www.icare.com.hk/pc/e_home.asp (English)
www.icare.com.hk/pc/c_home.asp (Chinese)

Microsoft Windows Server System

Microsoft Windows Server System integrated server infrastructure software is designed to support end-to-end solutions built on Windows Server 2003. It creates an infrastructure based on integrated innovation, Microsoft's holistic approach to building products and solutions that are intrinsically designed to work together and interact seamlessly with other data and applications across your IT environment. This helps you reduce the costs of ongoing operations, deliver a more secure and reliable IT infrastructure, and drive valuable new capabilities for the future growth of your business.

For more information about Windows Server System, go to: www.microsoft.com/windowsserversystem

Software and Services

- Technologies
 - Microsoft Exchange Server Best Practices Analyzer
- Microsoft Services

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