

BUYER CASE STUDY

MTS Allstream: Achieving Differentiation Through UC Network Performance Management

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IDC OPINION

This IDC study investigates how MTS Allstream has leveraged Apparent Networks' AppCritical solution to deliver its customers an innovative and differentiated experience that provides end-to-end management and support of their Unified Communications (UC) environments.

This study provides insight into the key drivers that led MTS Allstream to pursue a network (including application) performance management solution, the decision criteria used for choosing Apparent Networks, and the key findings from the implementation.

Based on MTS Allstream's experience with Apparent Networks' AppCritical solution, IDC observes the following:

- ☒ **Agility and responsiveness define Apparent Networks.** Apparent Networks worked closely with MTS Allstream to deploy a network management solution on-time and on-point. Apparent Networks offered its expertise in network management through training and knowledge transfer sessions to MTS Allstream.
- ☒ **AppCritical enables differentiated customer experiences.** With AppCritical, MTS Allstream was able to expand beyond its UC design and implementation practice to include the ongoing optimization of customers' entire UC environments. With this continuous lifecycle of services, MTS Allstream has positioned itself as a full solution provider and partner with its customers, delivering value through real-time network visibility, detection and correction that identifies potential problems before they occur to ensure optimal performance.
- ☒ **Real-time network visibility is cost effective.** As a software-only solution, AppCritical requires no instrumentation on network endpoints, making it less costly and complex for MTS Allstream to deploy, manage and maintain. As a result, the solution has enabled MTS Allstream to be responsive to its customers' needs ensuring business continuity, while using its resources efficiently.

"AppCritical allows us to differentiate ourselves in the market and deliver a value-added solution with compelling economics." — Thabang Mashologu, Senior Product Manager of Managed Services, MTS Allstream

IN THIS BUYER CASE STUDY

This IDC case study, sponsored by Apparent Networks, investigates how MTS Allstream used Apparent Network's network performance management solution to launch a differentiated customer experience. IDC provides insight into MTS Allstream's decision to implement the solution, the implementation process, the business value delivered, and lessons learned.

METHODOLOGY

On April 16, 2009, IDC interviewed Thabang Mashologu, Senior Product Manager of Managed Services, and Avneet Sandhu, Senior Product Marketing Analyst, of MTS Allstream. IDC would like to thank Mashologu and Sandhu for their contributions to the case study.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Organization Overview

MTS Allstream is one of Canada's leading national communications providers. Based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, MTS Allstream is a wholly owned subsidiary of Manitoba Telecom Services Inc. (TSX: MBT). With over 6,000 employees, the company provides a range of communications solutions including high-speed Internet, wireless, digital TV, IP connectivity services and UC.

THE APPROACH

Business Drivers

MTS Allstream's mission is to deliver true value as seen through the eyes of its customers. This mission statement was a driving force behind an initiative to bring a differentiated and cost effective network management solution to its customers, while increasing revenue.

Traditionally, MTS Allstream focused on the design and implementation of business-enhancing IP communications and collaboration solutions. After deploying UC environments, which can include PBX, voice mail, application servers, and the underlying routing and switching infrastructure, the company would offer its customers maintenance services. However, these maintenance offerings did not allow customers to out-task the operation and optimization of what was becoming an increasingly complex UC environment.

In the years prior to 2007, MTS Allstream recognized the opportunity to deliver greater value by helping its customers manage their UC environments, while creating a new revenue stream for the company. Far from a "me too" offering, the solution had to demonstrate innovation, and differentiate the company relative to its competitors. Mashologu's cross-functional product development team recognized that to deliver

true value, the support model had to put end-user Quality of Experience (QoE) of the entire converged network and applications first.

Solution Requirements

To deliver a differentiated UC experience, the product development team needed a solution that would provide:

- ☒ Real time proactive Quality of Service (QoS) monitoring to anticipate network outages and poor application performance issues before they occur
- ☒ End-to-end visibility into customer's UC environments
- ☒ Resource efficiency
- ☒ Innovation and differentiation
- ☒ Vendor agnostic support to work with customers' existing assets - potentially from multiple communications vendors

Selecting the Solution

The development team's goal was to find a vendor that could help them create a unique package offering that would deliver system analytics and monitoring optimal availability, health and performance of the UC devices and applications, over a customer's Local Area Network (LAN) / Wide Area Network (WAN) environment. The team began their search for a vendor that could deliver this level of visibility and monitoring capability through online research, and seeking referrals from channel partners. After evaluating prospects against selection criteria and competitor offerings, MTS Allstream developed a short list of vendors.

Apparent Networks was one of the companies on the shortlist – a vendor that came highly recommended from a channel partner that had used the solution for pre-deployment testing and remedial troubleshooting. The channel partner was particularly pleased with the fact that AppCritical was software-only, reducing the resources it needed to deploy the solution. The product development team was attracted to this lean software delivery model since one of their solution requirements was resource efficiency. Many of the other QoS management solutions evaluated required deploying hardware-based probes or appliances on multiple network nodes and endpoints, which would lead to more complex provisioning and maintenance.

The development team was attracted to Apparent Networks' location and origin – that a Canadian vendor that was close to its offices would be in a position to visit them face to face for training purposes, or for any potential problems they encountered.

"They are Canadian, so for me, their proximity spoke to their potential responsiveness."

The team was also impressed with how AppCritical could monitor and measure key characteristics on how voice, video and other collaboration applications are

experienced by end users - even if the customer networks included portions owned and controlled by providers other than MTS Allstream.

"Since AppCritical is vendor-agnostic we can support all of our partner platforms. Even if the customer is on another provider network, we have end-to-end visibility."

These product features, testimonials, and company characteristics, along with demonstrations assured the development team that Apparent Networks was a good fit with their project requirements.

Solution Architecture

MTS Allstream implemented the following network performance management solution from Apparent Networks:

AppCritical. A network performance management solution that gives customers real-time views into how network performance impacts application delivery and their users' quality of experience. Through continuous, real-time monitoring and system analytics, it enables fast and effective resolution of network problems.

With its patented TruPath technology, AppCritical is designed to improve the performance and reliability of voice, video and data applications deployed over complex IP networks. The software-only solution requires no instrumentation on network endpoints, and provides IT teams with complete, end-to-end network path performance information, including visibility into segments they neither own nor manage such as their carrier's network, service provider's cloud, or other external networks.

Implementing the Solution

Once MTS Allstream completed its due diligence and had Apparent Networks complete a proof of concept, the product development team gave Apparent Networks approval to proceed with the project. Apparent Networks' technology specialists led MTS Allstream through five days of implementation, training and knowledge transfer to MTS Allstream support personnel.

"We were under time restraints given the project deadline. Apparent Networks was quick to respond and helped us roll-out the solution in full, and on time."

When the new service was launched in late July 2008, Avneet Sandhu, Senior Product Marketing Analyst at MTS Allstream, recalls that the service was well-received by customers and by the internal sales team.

"The launch went smoothly...sales representatives were excited to offer the new package to our customers, and customers immediately saw the value our offering could deliver."

Business Value

With Apparent Networks' AppCritical solution, MTS Allstream can position itself as a trusted partner, not only for the design and development of a customer's UC environment, but also for the ongoing management and assurance of an optimally performing UC environment. This end-to-end full service approach has effectively augmented MTS Allstream's UC portfolio, and has opened up a consistent and lucrative revenue stream for the company.

While traditional service providers may approach customer needs for PBX, LAN and WAN management with disconnected services operated in silos, which often result in poor customer satisfaction levels - with AppCritical, MTS Allstream now has a holistic UC performance management service that puts the customer experience first.

Apparent Network's solution has enabled MTS Allstream to realize the following key benefits:

- ☒ The timely launch of its new package offering, which subsequently led to the realization of a new revenue stream
- ☒ Enables real time proactive monitoring of live converged networks, mitigating the risk of failed or poorly performing applications, improving responsiveness and, ultimately, end-user customer satisfaction
- ☒ Vendor and provider network agnostic software integrates with customers' existing infrastructure, and a software delivery approach makes it simple to deploy and manage, with minimal resources required
- ☒ The solution positions MTS Allstream competitively in the market, differentiating its offering as a full solution provider that can ensure network and application performance optimization

"Apparent Networks has consistently demonstrated excellence in its solution delivery and responsiveness to our needs from both a technical and customer service perspective." — Thabang Mashologu, Senior Product Manager of Managed Services, MTS Allstream

FUTURE OUTLOOK

While MTS Allstream praises the AppCritical solution for providing it with a competitive advantage, Mashologu recognizes that the company can leverage additional features and capabilities that AppCritical can offer, which would further differentiate its customer offering. By taking advantage of recent enhancements to AppCritical, such as improved real-time dashboard reporting functionality, MTS Allstream believes it can continue to differentiate its offering and positioning in the market.

LESSONS LEARNED

Based on MTS Allstream's experience with Apparent Networks' AppCritical solution, IDC believes:

- ☒ Real time visibility into network performance can be cost effective with software-based solutions that require no instrumentation on network endpoints, making it less costly from a deployment and maintenance perspective.
- ☒ With increasingly complex UC environments, having a holistic view into the entire UC environment and being able to monitor network performance in real-time helps prevent outages and bottlenecks before they occur. A company like Apparent Networks can provide this type of innovative and proactive approach to network management.
- ☒ Under tight timelines and demanding project goals, small agile vendors like Apparent Networks are well-positioned to adjust to meet project needs, on-time and on-point.
- ☒ A vendor that has deep domain expertise in network management, such as Apparent Networks, provides great value. Such as vendor can offer expertise through training and knowledge transfer sessions to get customers up to speed quickly.
- ☒ A great product will continue to deliver features and functions that can help a company continually differentiate itself and stay ahead of the competition.

AppCritical's software-only solution, with its holistic and real-time approach to network management, has been a success because it fits with MTS Allstream's mission to deliver customer value by remaining focused, responsive, and lean. With AppCritical, MTS Allstream's UC division has delivered an innovative and differentiated customer experience that continues to deliver value for both MTS Allstream and its customers.

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