# Monitor business-critical SaaS Applications

Ensure Performance to Boost ROI

The rise of software as a service (SaaS) and the explosion of cloud services have created a shift in how technology is being purchased, deployed and consumed at the enterprise level. Instead of technology procurement being strictly controlled by IT departments, decision makers in finance, marketing, sales, HR and other departments are now acting more independently. With little need for IT during the implementation phase, many business units are freely choosing and deploying SaaS solutions at will. Clearly, this allows companies to easily take advantage of new technologies as they adapt to evolving market and business needs. While this model may keep IT from having to get involved at the start, as soon as performance issues emerge, these new "technology buyers" head straight to IT to fix it.

It's not surprising that this after-the-fact way of involving IT has its drawbacks. Because the IT department wasn't involved in the vetting or implementation process, they aren't set up to determine if the level of service users are currently receiving meets the metrics outlined in the contract. More importantly, they won't know how to diagnose issues related to a particular SaaS or cloud service should they occur. Companies must solve this fundamental disconnect before they become too reliant on their SaaS providers.
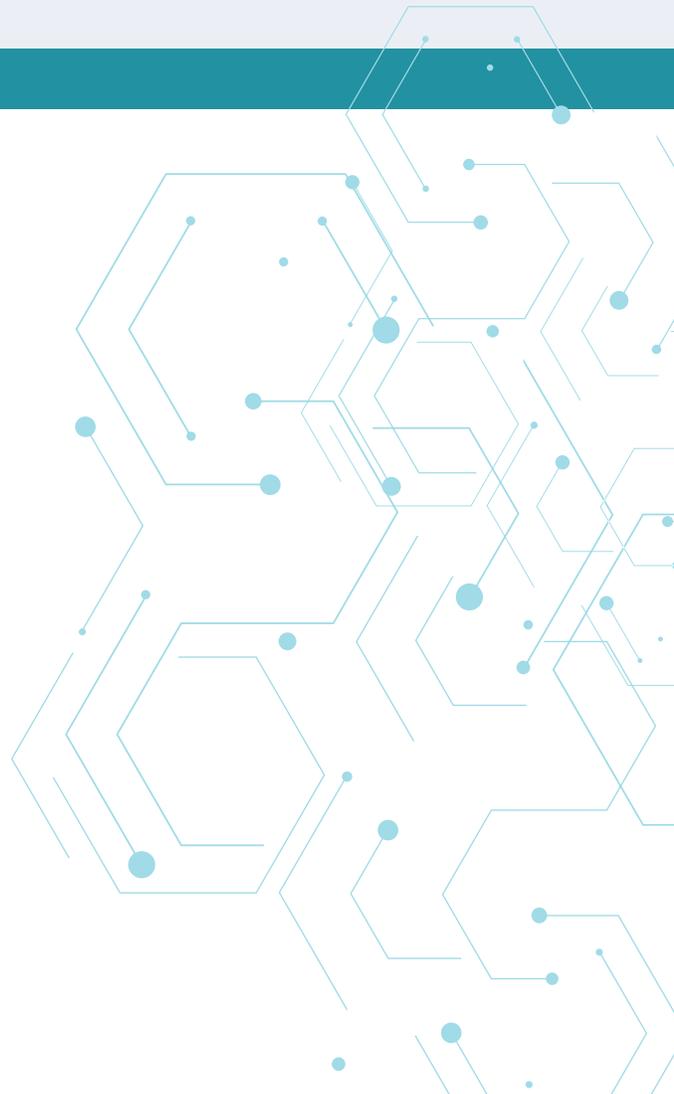
Those organizations that migrate to SaaS applications often grow complacent with the cloud-based service, trusting the service provider to meet SLAs on a daily basis. In fact, most no longer bother to check and see how the application is performing from the user's perspective. They don't have tools in place to determine if SaaS solutions are working fast enough to ensure workforce efficiency or whether delays are causing user frustration and productivity losses.

For a SaaS migration strategy to be successful, companies must implement an application monitoring solution that is capable of tracking performance and network activity from the service all the way to the end user—across the entire organization. Without this visibility, they can't know if they are overpaying for a service that may be under delivering against user expectations.

Performance Monitoring Across The Application Landscape

In the coming years, SaaS will significantly outpace traditional software product delivery systems—in fact, IDC reports that $1 out of every $5 spent on software will be earmarked for cloud-based offerings by 2018.

With SaaS adoption is growing, IT organizations can no longer afford to leave these solutions unmonitored. Today most companies consume a majority of their business-critical applications—Salesforce, Microsoft Office 365, SAP, Oracle, Intuit—via the cloud. As the number of SaaS applications continue to rise, companies must expand their performance management solutions to handle these solutions as well.

Unfortunately, the SaaS model has created a shadow IT issue in many companies. While there is no stopping the shift to a SaaS model, it is clear that IT departments need to take back some control to ensure that the company has the resources it needs to guarantee connectivity. To start, companies must understand the differences between SaaS applications and on-premises solutions and how to adapt to new challenges.

Managing an Increasingly Hybrid Environment

As more SaaS solutions become available, many businesses are considering whether they should migrate additional workloads to the cloud or stick to the on-premises solutions that have served them in years past. Before making a decision, companies must understand the fundamental differences between the two approaches.

As a quick reminder, these are the key characteristics of on-premises applications:

- On-premises applications require upfront costs for relevant hardware, software licenses and essential equipment.

- IT departments are on their own when it comes to hardware installation and software configuration.

- Keeping hardware and operation on-premises limits the risk of cyber crime aimed at compromising the particular service or application.

- Companies retain complete control over equipment and operations.

In contrast, SaaS applications represent a shift in mindset as companies with limited or untraditional IT departments seek more convenient, manageable and scalable solutions. Companies must be aware of certain tradeoffs before choosing between the cloud-based options and on-premises solutions:

- Pay-for-use fees can add up quickly as the solution scales

- Customization options are limited because the solution is delivered by a service provider

- With Internet-based service delivery models, security risks are higher than with on-premises solutions

- Companies have no visibility into performance and the end-user experience because all the hardware and software is controlled by the service provider

The Benefits and Drawbacks to the SaaS Shift

Many organizations are embracing the SaaS mode for a variety of reasons—faster time to deployment, simplified management responsibilities, instant scalability and a budgetary shift from a CAPEX to an OPEX model. The SaaS option allows companies to offload much of the upfront implementation work. Business leaders no longer have to wait for IT departments to order equipment, make infrastructure changes, configure servers and install software on individual desktops—they simply sign up and get started. As long as the user experience is good and there are no nagging performance delays, organizational adoption rates tend to be quite high. More importantly, this streamlined approach makes business units more agile and leaves IT groups free to concentrate on more value-added projects.

Unfortunately, as businesses outsource more of their application management responsibilities to cloud service providers, they often fall into a trap. Because they are so hands-off from an IT perspective, everyone always seems to assume that the applications are working as optimally.

When users complain that the performance is slow, managers and IT administrators just assume it's a sporadic problem or maybe a user-specific device issue. Unless there is a complete outage, complaints about SaaS application performance are rarely investigated.

However, even if IT wanted to check and see what's going on, very few have the tools they need to evaluate performance from the end user's perspective. They can check performance at the network level but that doesn't provide the whole picture. If companies don't have any visibility into the app ecosystem, there's no way to analyze SaaS application performance. While service providers are responsible for keeping the application up and running, companies still need to maintain a certain level of visibility if they want to be sure they are getting the service levels they're paying for. To keep their workforce productive, enterprises need to understand how each SaaS application is performing—on a regional and user level. Clearly, the SaaS performance monitoring narrative must change to make this happen.

Adapting to Modern IT Monitoring Needs

The need for full application performance monitoring in IT isn't new—it's existed as long as IT departments have been answering to users. Companies have always set out to monitor the performance of various applications and services, but the way IT professionals have done it has changed over time.

Traditionally, IT focused on one dominant application at a time. These applications were purchased, deployed and provisioned separately—often they had their own administrator with dedicated tools for ensuring that performance and uptime metrics were being met. With the rise of SaaS applications, the service provider has taken over as the group responsible for monitoring KPIs and ensuring uptime. Many IT groups believe that all they have to do now is monitor the network—if everything looks good there, they assume that all of their SaaS applications are performing optimally and there are no delays at the user level. With so much corporate work being done via SaaS applications, companies can't afford to leave it up to service providers to ensure that their workforce is being as productive as possible.

Instead, IT departments need new application performance

monitoring tools to keep up with the changes that SaaS solutions are bringing to the business world. These new tools must provide the following features:

- A full view of the application ecosystem: Companies must be able to identify which applications are running, where they're running, who is using them and why they're using them. Knowing what's happening in the application ecosystem is essential to getting the most value from any SaaS contract.

- End-to-end application path visibility: It's not enough to be satisfied with the fact that a service is being delivered to end users. SaaS performance monitoring requires 100% visibility throughout the application path. The application path starts with an end user, travels through the network (the WAN, LAN and WiFi networks) and to the application itself.

- Understanding the user experience: Companies must focus on the actual end-user experience associated with SaaS applications. The workforce is most affected by sluggish application performance. Keying into the end-user experience enables decision makers to get out ahead of SaaS issues.

With SaaS predicted to be the preferred software delivery model, IT departments can't rely on traditional application performance monitoring strategies to provide enterprise-wide assurance. While IT groups aren't the sole selectors and gatekeepers for enterprise applications anymore, that doesn't mean they aren't ultimately responsible for their performance from a user perspective.

IT teams need user-level performance insights for a SaaS and cloud service strategy to be successful. Until now, SaaS application performance monitoring methods within the enterprise have been too complex for most. However, AppNeta recently released a SaaS app monitoring solution capable of providing the total visibility necessary to keep track of third-party business-critical applications and ensure that they are delivering against the SLAs set for them.

Visit AppNeta now to learn more about achieving the necessary visibility to ensure that enterprises are getting the performance they need—and pay for—to create an efficient workforce.