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Virgin Media Brings It All Together With Netezza's Data Warehouse Appliance

Netezza Performance Server (NPS) Server

REVIEWER: Paul Froggatt, information management manager for Virgin Media.

BACKGROUND: Virgin Media is the UK's leading entertainment and communications company and has nearly 10 million customers.

PLATFORMS: Netezza's NPS 8450z and 8050z data warehouse appliances.

PROBLEM SOLVED: Virgin Media was created through the merger of three telecom companies: Virgin Mobile, NTL and Telewest. After the merger, we found ourselves with a mixed inheritance of business intelligence tools. We needed to find a way to pull the systems together quickly. The NPS data warehouse appliances allowed us to quickly load the data from our previous systems and create a single environment.

PRODUCT FUNCTIONALITY: The NPS appliances are used across the organization by revenue assurance, credit services, product marketing and product pricing teams. In the revenue assurance team, the investment in the 8450z and 8050z Netezza systems was recovered within just three months. Compared with our previous Oracle-based system, the NPS data warehouse appliance runs queries 252 times faster on average.

STRENGTHS: The NPS data warehouse appliance allowed us to consolidate several data warehouse systems into a single environment. We are able to run Business Objects software seamlessly on the appliances, and reports created through the software are now running 100 times faster than they were previously. Netezza's technology is incredibly easy to manage, and we've been able to reduce the use of our database administration team significantly. Also, users are free to run the targeted queries they want instead of having to spend hours carefully crafting queries and testing results with smaller ranges first.

WEAKNESSES: Because the Netezza system is a black box appliance, it is not readily amenable to traditional systems management techniques. While we have the ability to monitor disk utilization in terms of capacity, it is not easy to understand how busy the appliance is in terms of internal network/disk/processor utilization, hence it is difficult to predict and plan for potential future upgrades. Another system management area where Netezza could improve is in the process of reclaiming freed space in database tables to make them more efficient and ensuring availability of the entire database during a data reclaim operation.

SELECTION CRITERIA: In October 2006, we began looking for a solution that would allow us to scale up our existing data warehouse to incorporate NTL data and deliver better performance than the existing Oracle UNIX platform. To select a new solution, we performed a careful analysis of the options on the market, whittling them down to a short list of four vendors. We then engaged each vendor for off-site proof-of-performance exercises. Netezza scored high on all the counts that matter - scalability, performance, simplicity and total cost of ownership.

DELIVERABLES: The NPS system is used in several departments for many different business functions. Virgin Media loads about 10,000 data files containing 100 million call detail record onto its NPS system every day. Each of the departments has super users who know the system intimately, and there are around 100 users on the data warehouse specifically. In credit services, for example, Netezza's data warehouse appliance allows users to quickly spot high telephony usage and proactively manage any credit problems before they arise. The product marketing teams use the system to forecast the effects of telephony tariff changes and plan how to best react to competitors' offerings. Additionally, the simplicity of approach in the Netezza system is fundamental both for our IT department and for our users. This new approach has cut out the complexity of traditional database implementations, and the data warehouse appliances are delivering on that promise. Because we don't have to think about the layout of data, we are reaping productivity gains with new solutions.

VENDOR SUPPORT: Netezza is easy to do business with and is willing to invest time in its customers to understand their needs and work with them to deliver real business value. Netezza has proved to be flexible and creative in the sales process and responsive and supportive in the post-sales period.

DOCUMENTATION: The documentation for the NPS data warehouse appliance is very straightforward and easy to understand. You could run the product easily by relying on the documentation itself.

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