

Advance7 helps ensure Ideal World's systems are open for business 24 / 7

Ideal World is a dynamic company offering an extensive range of home, fashion and electronics products via digital television and the web. When the company won the rights to broadcast via Freeview, their customer base expanded by a further three million viewers at a stroke. In 2010, when the current analogue signal is switched off, Ideal World will be available to the whole of the UK's 26 million households.

Ideal World's business is built on IT and its systems are an integral part of the customer's experience. At peak times the company can take over 2,000 orders per hour, with an average value of £30 to £40 each. Consequently if the system fails for any short period, the cost to the business would be dramatic. Any downtime in the system could also lead to a tarnished reputation, with customers choosing to shop elsewhere.

The Challenge

Ideal World currently operates with a heavily bespoke legacy system, and have recently been engaged in a long-term project to completely replace it.

The new ISIS system will integrate all the separate parts of the business, including website shopping, the sales call centre, telephone voice automatic recognition system, warehousing, finance, customer services, and even production services in the studio.

With so much depending on the new system, the company had to be 100% sure that the application and underlying infrastructure could meet the load demands being placed on it. Ideal World did not have the resources in house to test the new system, and neither did the third party supplying the application.

Ideal World needed to call in external resource to test the load capability of the new integrated system. "Load testing is imperative for our type of business," explains

Michael Williams, Management Information Systems Manager at Ideal World. "Advance7 were the specialists in the field, which is why we selected them to run the tests."

The Solution

The testing process took two weeks in total. As Advance7 offer a complete turnkey solution, they were involved in all stages of the process, assessing needs, configuring the software, running the tests and delivering results.

Having previously used the testing tool Citratest, Ideal World was keen to use the same application in the new tests, saving on licensing costs. Advance7 configured a series of automatic scripts for Citratest to simulate users from all the separate business areas, including the web, telesales, voice recognition and internal reports.

Advance7 spent crucial time before the test evaluating the required outcomes. "They did a lot of work upfront on getting the requirements from us," explains Mr Williams, "it was ideal as we devised tests we all understood and wanted."

The final test simulated a maximum of 400 web users, as well as 100 internal users and some voice recognition, all running concurrently. The actual testing itself only had to run for half an hour to pinpoint the main problems and bottlenecks. During the test Advance7 also monitored traffic on Ideal World's current websites. "That was particularly useful as we didn't currently have that information," says Mr Williams. "They assisted greatly with helping us understand the traffic."

To identify bottlenecks on the new system, Advance7 used their unique FOCUS technology. Two serious bottlenecks were pinpointed, one in the new core system, and one in Sage, an aligned system. Whenever the core system called Sage to set up a line item, it took 25 seconds each time, leading to unacceptable delays.

Advance7 were able to re-engineer the system on site to solve the bottlenecks. They then presented an in-depth report to Ideal World outlining the areas for attention, most of which concerned the SQL database performance. By understanding the requirements from the outset, Advance7 were able to deliver practical solutions. Paul Offord, Managing Director at Advance7, places great importance on delivering a detailed report. "Carrying out the analysis after the test is essential. Simply giving a pass or fail is not enough, you have to help the client understand how to fix any problems that arise."

Since implementing the report's recommendations, Ideal World have asked Advance7 to carry out further tests. The final tests pinpointed other areas for optimisation, enabling Ideal World to fine-tune the new system still further.

The Benefit

The key benefit of load testing for Ideal World is risk mitigation. Following the load testing, Ideal World now knows that the new integrated system will be able to meet the demands placed upon it. The company has also benefited from a fast turnaround, as Mr Williams points out. "The third party is still conducting tests following the recommendations from Advance7 and plans to implement them on the next release of the platform. By choosing Advance7, we have a speedier response to solving problems in the system."

Ideal World is impressed with the expertise Advance7 brought to the project. "They have a wide experience in a wide range of enterprises, so they are not intimidated by the scale of any test," says Mr Williams.

As Advance7 are not tied to any one type of load tool technology, they are able to work with whatever testing application the customer prefers. They are completely impartial, as Mr Offord explains. "As we don't sell hardware or software, we won't ever try to sell a customer equipment, but will simply focus on their needs. We provide answers to IT challenges, and use the Rapid Problem Resolution methodology to deal with any problems that arise during the testing process."

One final benefit to Ideal World is Advance7's progressive approach. "When we failed the final load testing, they provided us with training to be able to run some tests in the future ourselves," says Mr Williams. "That was a helpful extra from the Advance7 team, and we valued their constructive approach."

Challenge

To test a new integrated system before deployment across a business totally reliant on IT.

Solution

By writing bespoke scripts for the client's preferred load testing tool and monitoring performance, Advance7 helped pinpoint bottlenecks and create solutions on site.

Business Benefits

The solution has helped Ideal World mitigate risk when it migrates to the new system.

- ✓ Solved bottlenecks and highlighted areas for optimisation.
- ✓ Helped eradicate any downtime, which would have created a huge loss in revenue and customer reputation.
- ✓ Provided a proactive approach, supplying Ideal World with the knowledge to run independent tests in the future.