

MAJOR ANALYSIS OF FTSE 100 WEBSITES REVEALS ALARMING PERFORMANCE ISSUES

One of the issues highlighted by the research is the current approach to performance analysis. The speed of the Web's integration into business processes has not been matched by the development of performance analysis techniques. Companies currently use network management tools to monitor the availability of their Web servers, however while all servers may be functioning adequately, this does not mean that the customer accessing the Web site is having a positive experience. Bandwidth, download speeds and page redirections can impair the customer's view of the site.

Continues Moore, "Companies must recognise that if they have an on-line presence the Internet is an extension of their network. Simply monitoring servers is not enough. The best benchmark is to interrogate Web sites as a customer would – using systems that constantly try to download the site from a range of ISPs to create a true picture of the way their business conveys itself to the customer."

In addition, most companies rely on their ISP to provide performance data. The data is then used to check if the ISP has met its agreed service level agreements (SLA). Not one company achieved the 'five nines' SLA that many companies aspire to. This suggests that IT managers should check the analysis they are using to validate the performance of their SLA.

Performance monitoring

In analysing performance, Parallel used its Nexus Watch monitoring product. Using two ISPs, the FTSE 100 Web sites were interrogated automatically at intervals of five minutes to develop a clear picture of on-line performance. Several key criteria emerged that companies should consider when benchmarking their on-line performance.

Site Availability

Site availability is an important variable - a customer may be prepared to wait a short while for a page to appear, but if nothing happens or an error is returned, customers will go elsewhere.

Using new Web monitoring products, companies can track their real site availability and isolate specific problems as they occur. It also ensures that companies have access to their own data and will no longer be reliant on analysis provided by their ISP's.

Server Performance

It is generally accepted that a Web page download time of eight seconds or less is required to provide an acceptable 'feeling of speed'. Parallel's research revealed that for customers using a standard modem, this limit would be breached for 44 per cent of the FTSE 100 companies. Using a web management system such as Nexus Watch that monitors customers' experience of the site, problems with download times would be spotted in minutes. Parallel found that in one instance, a company took over 26 days to resolve a serious performance problem that was causing a 29 second delay for customers downloading their home page.

Page Size

Parallel's research showed that the average home page size of FTSE 100 companies was 59,760 bytes. "Some web designers recommend that web pages do not exceed 30k bytes. The average for the FTSE 100 companies was nearly double. The worst culprit had nearly twenty times the recommended amount. Let's not forget we are talking about one single page," adds Moore.

It is imperative for all companies (and especially those who using the web as a shop front) to provide an efficient service to customers. If a customer simply wants a contact number, they should not have to wait for video clips and graphics to download.

