

Case Study:

VM Informer de-mists the cloud for IT Global

The operational advantage of VM Informer is the perspective and visibility it provides us.

"What keeps people like me awake at night is the thought than one of my guys accidentally changed a setting that compromised a customer network or our entire infrastructure"

The marketing opportunity is differentiating your cloud service.

"We are operate in a completely different environment now...we have to differentiate our offering" We want to check about 600 settings per host for complete surety.... You know that human error rate is 1-2%.

Now we can demonstrate that we have a special methods to our customers - but also show them that we constantly check against any policy, process or particular setting.



IT Global Networks is an Australian owned supplier of Information Technology solutions. The company has been in business since 1983. IT Global has designed, implemented and supported over 3,000 integrated networked solutions. Their core business is to help customer's use technology to improve service to their customers. IT Global boasts a diverse range of customer from micro-small office to retail network chains and franchises. Their goal is to reduce staff frustration with technology and improve operational efficiency for their customers. They have been providing remote network and infrastructure services since the late 1990s. These services have allowed their customers to lower costs, forget about the complexities of IT, and concentrate upon their own core business activities.

Managing IT Global's infrastructure

David Moore is IT Global's CTO. *" We also have been offering hosted services a long time before it became fashionable. Our customers have entrusted us with a critical part of their business. We take our duty of care and responsibilities to protect their information assets very seriously. When I reflect on our history, we have been using virtualized infrastructure to manage our customers for years. It's a common story, initially we converted our physical hosting to a virtualized infrastructure to save costs and gain greater flexibility, resilience and redundancy. Our customers operate 24/7 and we need to be able to offer this up-time in the most effective and efficient manner."*

Commercial realities

IT Global customers stay long after their contracted period expires. Steve Stuart, CEO, puts this down to several factors: the provision of personalized service; the long tenure of staff; and familiarity with customer's computing infrastructure. *" We are operating in a completely different environment now. All hosting providers are now called 'Cloud providers'. In winning new business we compete with some organizations that are offering some minimal configurations at some very low prices – some locally but many offshore. We don't have a problem if we can articulate our service to prospective customers to explain the assurance levels offered."*

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A tool to help us manage our infrastructure

IT Global's team is constantly trying to improve it's own efficiencies. They investigate many utilities that might help them operate better. VM informer looked promising because it was built for virtualization. IT Global tested VM informer against its own infrastructure and within an hour had a full inventory of the management layer, all the hosts and virtual machines using VM informer's standard policy. *"As technologist we expect things to work immediately, VM informer did that. It picked up things that we needed to improve and assured us that we had everything else right. The comfort I get from assuring my hosted infrastructure is invaluable. What keeps people like me awake at night is the thought that one of my guys accidentally changed a setting that compromised a customer network or our entire infrastructure!"*

The technical team at IT Global particularly liked the simplicity of the VM informer reports. The technical team are busy. They just want to know if anything is wrong and what the recommended fix is, VM informer gives them that 'out of the box'. VM informer provided the assurance that IT Global's infrastructure is good and remains that way. IT Global sees this is a competitive advantage, because as a small cloud provider they can compete with the biggest telco, or the cheaper hosting offerings based on assured delivery levels.

"The big companies have their brand, but actually the problem is bigger for them than us. We want to check about 600 settings per host for complete assurance. You know that human error rate is 1-2%. Even if you don't check everything, because some issues might not be relevant, you are still looking at big numbers. Our people are busy, they are constantly active, but they are human. You can just imagine what the problems are for the biggest suppliers, uncommitted staff and no significant auditing. Our customers don't want that!"

Taking on new machines and infrastructure

IT Global recently acquired another entity. *"We have rules about keeping snapshots"* said David Moore. Contrary to similar policies IT Global discovered the new entity had snapshots in their infrastructure. VM informer immediately highlighted these snapshots and where they were.

As a result of that experience, any time IT Global transfers any infrastructure they assess with VM informer first.

"When we trial management tools we are extremely critical of the output and the value offered. It is amazing how the big vendors have missed some of the key virtualization issues in their products"

Virtualization assurance

VM informer delivers an efficient mechanism to audit virtualized infrastructure. It is easy to use on across the whole infrastructure or a client domain. Cloud providers can load, check audit and report quickly and accurately on just about any virtualized attribute.

"You would have to be pretty arrogant to just rely on your data center management processes without constant auditing"

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Own policies

VMInformer ships with some default security policies. There are hundreds of settings in those policies. IT Global felt that some policy elements were not relevant to their operation. IT Global technical team simply edited the policy rules to reflect their needs. They have since developed their own policy to reflect their hosting method. This forms the basis of IT Global's competitive marketing in cloud services. Now, they can run a targeted assessment with their own policy, a VMInformer one or for a specialized customer requirement. They share these results with their customers.

The technical team at IT Global quickly worked out that they could use VMInformer to investigate other attributes of their virtualized infrastructure. They built what they call mini-policies to poll the infrastructure to check the disposition of the target from a particular attribute. The results returned in seconds. They are accurate and the automation avoids the typing of command scripts (which if mis-typed will return the wrong result).

About VMInformer

VMInformer provides the necessary assessment method to constantly audit virtual infrastructure. This allows public cloud providers to differentiate their services by demonstrating that their policies and procedures are enforced.

Why VMInformer exceeds existing monitoring tools

Virtualization has been adopted by hosting providers. Often the underlining infrastructure has been built by employees than have since left, sometimes delivered by third parties, or inherited configurations through acquisition. The following issues are prominent in almost all virtualization deployments:

- Lack of duty segregation across IT disciplines;
- Less control over the provisioning and management of virtual servers, machines;
- Traditional measurement methods and tools do not detect the special attributes of virtualized infrastructure;

Resulting in the fact that most deployments are not optimally configured.

Existing monitoring technologies were designed for physical devices, they do not report accurately in a virtualized environment. The lack of visibility into the controls and settings of a virtualized environment is the same problem for cloud providers as corporate IT managers. Until now, it has been prohibitively expensive to run thorough checks. VMInformer can audit thousands of settings accurately in a matter of minutes.