



“SYBASE’S NO NONSENSE SUPPORT FOR PARTNERS IS EXCELLENT. WE WERE ABLE TO GET THE SOFTWARE, DEVELOP THE APPLICATION, AND GET TO MARKET QUITE RAPIDLY.”

— GRANT GLADING, VP SALES AND MARKETING, INTERLINK

THE ENTERPRISE
IMPROVED.

INTERLINK SOFTWARE

Summary

Interlink Software has built a business services modeling application that provides a view of an enterprise from the perspective of the services it provides. In the event of a technology fault, it not only identifies the root cause of the failure, it also assesses the affected services and business costs associated with the failure. In 2003, Interlink upgraded their application to use Sybase Adaptive Server® Enterprise as an embedded technology and became a Sybase OEM partner. The upgrade improved application performance and made the application more self-contained, which ultimately increased its sales potential.

Business Challenge

Identify a high-performance database vendor with attractive OEM pricing and partner benefits.

Solution

Sybase ASE is the database for Interlink’s POWERPack application providing robust transaction and data management. Embedding Sybase Adaptive Server Enterprise offered performance, OEM pricing, and an active partnership program.

Results

- 200% – 600% increase in application performance
- Embedded database improves sales opportunities for product—and delivers complete solution for end-users
- Simplifies sales cycles by removing the need for additional database licensing
- Database standardization decreased quality assurance costs per release and support costs per customer
- Competitive OEM pricing and increased visibility with Sybase OEM Partner Program

Industry

Software Manufacturing

ASSESSING COLLATERAL BUSINESS DAMAGE FROM I.T. FAILURES

“THE COST OF DOWNTIME IN THE FINANCIAL SERVICES SECTOR HAS DRIVEN COMPANIES TO MANAGE BY BUSINESS SERVICES IN ORDER TO SEE THE REAL COSTS OF DOWNTIME. THEY CAN THEN PRIORITIZE THEIR WORKLOAD AND FIX THE MOST COSTLY, BUSINESS-CRITICAL FAULTS FIRST.”

What-if failure scenarios in the technology arena usually involve modeling the ripple effect of cascading failures through interrelated systems. Sybase partner Interlink Software has raised the business of modeling IT failure scenarios to an altogether higher dimension, with its business service management product. Interlink’s POWERpack manages corporate IT systems from a business perspective instead of the traditional technology perspective. POWERpack models vital business services by understanding, and then continuously monitoring, the underlying technology subsystems

the higher-level business services rely upon, searching for signs of early failure. If failures occur, alerts are sent to managers of the business areas as well as to the IT managers. Failure analysis is assessed in terms of service costs and in terms of contractual impacts on service level agreements (SLA)

Interlink has created an innovative system for immediately quantifying the collateral business damage incurred from technology failures. Once the damage is understood from a business services perspective, strategies can be invoked to avoid further damage, strategies that may take different, or perhaps broader, priorities into consideration than just IT repairs.

ANALYTICAL METHODS OF BUILDING BUSINESS SERVICE MODELS

Interlink provides a top-down analysis of business services, combined with a practical, bottom-up analysis of how the services are wired together.

Interlink CEO Lloyd Hopkins explains their approach, “What we analyze at the higher levels are the business functions being delivered. We also measure the business impacts from these functions becoming unavailable, the critical hours of required availability, and the costs of downtime to the business. We find that a lot of this information is quite hard to discover with automated applications, so that knowledge needs to be put into our models.”

An interesting aspect of bringing Interlink into a company is the business services audit is frequently an education for the customer, causing them to take a fresh look at their own enterprise. According to Hopkins, “Often customers don’t actually know the detailed composition of their services. They don’t understand what it would really mean to them if there was a failure, or what the cost of downtime would be for each of these different components. The time we spend in analysis is totally dependent upon the customer’s level of awareness of their environment and the services they deliver.”

The end result of the analysis is the Business Service Model. The model contains information on the hours the services are running, details about redundant components, and details of the relationships between various components. The model captures the structure and how it fits together

to provide business services. The intelligence in the model uses a number of different types of information that may include the time of day and the number of users logged on. They are all metrics used in the real-time modeling process to determine the current impact of a service failure.

ABOUT POWERPACK

The core component of POWERpack is a real-time enterprise server that relies on Sybase ASE database. Feeding into POWERpack are a series of Web client integrations for capturing events from different underlying technologies and historical reporting services. POWERpack also includes graphical Web consoles for monitoring the health of the enterprise business services with ‘drill down’ capability to identify and correct root causes of business service faults.

Grant Glading, vice-president of sales and marketing at Interlink, details the monitoring process, “The base functionality of POWERpack relies on operational network data monitoring. It integrates high volumes of event data from native systems and management systems, like Tivoli® from IBM® and Network Node Manager from HP®, into a common point. All of these IT management products consolidate alerts and metrics events. We distill these events down to a common format and apply prioritization and balancing correlation to get at the root causes. We have to filter out the noise from potentially hundreds of thousands or millions of these events or metrics per day, and zoom in on the critical technology faults. Once we have a sensible number of real critical faults, we then correlate those with the customer and service impacts and apply a cost to the downside. All of this is done in real-time.”

CHOOSING A PARTNER BASED ON TECHNOLOGY & WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

“WE WORKED WITH SYBASE PARTNER SUPPORT TEAM AND NEGOTIATED AN OEM DEAL FROM THE BEGINNING THAT FITS BOTH OUR BUSINESS MODEL AND THE PRICING STRUCTURE WE HAVE FOR THE PRODUCTS.”

— LLOYD HOPKINS

Interlink’s technology relies on monitoring the underlying event feeds from multiple corporate systems to recognize faults. The earlier versions of its application used third

party event managers. To end their reliance on these third party event managers, Interlink decided to write their own event manager, a task which required a high-performance database.

Interlink's software architecture places its metric collection and decision making algorithms squarely in the center of a storm of mostly discarded event messages. The discard decision cannot be made until the message is examined to determine if it is of interest or relates to the health of a higher-level business service. This process of event reduction, of being the central focal point for all event messages, places an enormous burden on the database server responsible for managing the traffic, and culled Interlink's potential database vendors down to a very short list. Then, the decision hinged on pricing, the ease of embedding the database in the central server, and vendor attitude.

“WHEN ONE OF OUR LARGE CUSTOMERS WAS CONSIDERING MIGRATING FROM ANOTHER SOLUTION TO OURS, THE SYBASE ACCOUNT MANAGER OFFERED TO CALL THEM UP AND GIVE THEM SOME ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND REASSURANCE ON THE SYBASE SIDE. SYBASE HAS BEEN A VERY HELPFUL PARTNER.”

— GRANT GLADING

Grant Glading talks about the search for a vendor, “Initially, when we looked at the different database vendors, we spoke to Sybase and found they were really keen to work with partners as compared with the other companies we had contacted. Sybase offered to come meet us in our offices to understand our requirements. I can tell you this, the other companies were not as easy to deal with. Up front, Sybase put the effort in and showed they were serious about partnerships and the OEM potential. Many of our developers were already comfortable with the Sybase ASE database and they had experience working with other ASE-based products. Sybase ASE is scalable; this is a real-time, high volume, mission critical environment and scalability is very important. Sybase ASE has also proved to be easy to embed in our product, we were not too sure about embedding some of the other products we evaluated. There were additional advantages such as knowing Sybase Replication Server was available to make sure the database could be replicated at the remote site.”

“SYBASE HAS INVITED US TO THEIR PARTNER EVENTS AND GIVEN US CHANCES TO PRESENT WHAT WE DO TO OTHER COMPANIES. THAT HAS HELPED US IMMENSELY.”

— GRANT GLADING

Stability was of paramount importance to Interlink as they made their decision. If in a crisis, the very tool keeping an enterprise informed on the health of its key business services were an early casualty, then the tool itself would have little value. Interlink needed a high volume, robust data repository that could be embedded in the nerve center of their Business Services Management product suite and never be a source of concern.

EMBEDDED SYBASE ASE EQUATES TO A FASTER AND SELF-CONTAINED APPLICATION

“OUR APPLICATION RUNS BETWEEN 200% AND 600% FASTER BECAUSE WE HAVE EMBEDDED SYBASE ASE AND HAVE MOVED AWAY FROM RELIANCE ON A THIRD PARTY EVENT MANAGER.”

— GRANT GLADING

Embedding Sybase Adaptive Server Enterprise in POWERpack greatly increased application performance and removed a dependency on third party event managers being installed at prospective customer sites.

Previously, POWERpack relied on various underlying third party event managers. The application would have to synchronize with the event manager, which meant it was limited to the event manager's speed. With Sybase ASE embedded in the application, Interlink controls the entire process from reading the incoming events to reporting the business impact. The application now runs between 2 and 6 times faster, decreasing the latency between the event's origin and its evaluation, improving real-time responsiveness. The net result is a faster, self-contained application.

Building a self-contained solution had implications beyond execution performance; it also broadened Interlink's potential customer base, as Glading explains, “The fact that we are now able to supply a complete standalone product solution has made a huge difference. We had been tied to certain types of third party event consoles, which limited our prospects. Now our prospect list is wide open—that certainly opens up more avenues. Since we embedded

Sybase ASE, we have added credit card companies, banks, and retailers to our customer list. That is a major benefit for the company.” Additionally, standardizing on an easy-to-embed database, decreased overall support costs and improved quality assurance. Simply put, fewer moving parts meant fewer unexpected events and a more finite testing configuration. Glading continues, “The reduced costs have provided more flexibility to position ourselves in different markets and segments within those markets.”

OEM PARTNER MEANS SIMPLIFIED LICENSING

Another benefit of being a Sybase OEM partner is a simplified sales cycle. The end-user only needs to do business with Interlink; they do not have to purchase a separate database license from a different vendor. Before they embedded Sybase ASE, customers who wanted to use Interlink’s historical reporting feature were asked to license and install a third party database. An OEM license eliminates this potentially troublesome request, allows partners to negotiate a limited use price for the database (versus a more costly, full use license), and removes a barrier that might otherwise have given a skittish customer cold feet.

MORE THAN DAMAGE CONTROL

Once an enterprise is modeled in Interlink’s Business Services Model, the model itself becomes a multi-purpose tool, useful beyond service interruption scenarios. Interlink customers use the system to plan improvements to the quality of services they deliver.

For example, they can better understand the risk and impact of change from a service perspective. As CEO Hopkins explains, “In the past when our customers changed some technology, they didn’t necessarily know what the business impact would be. With our product they can measure and minimize the risk of change in their environment.” The modeling capability is also useful for examining the cost/benefits ratio of hardening specific service areas. Decisions are made from objective information rather than simple fear of failure. Hopkins continues, “Customers can understand up front what the benefits of a redundant, resilient environment would be for a specific service, SLA, or application.”

PROVIDING ENTERPRISE-WIDE SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

When an organization understands where impacts will be felt in the customer base and demonstrates precise, surgical damage control, that organization demonstrates leadership.

If knowledge is power, then Interlink provides tools that empower its customer’s business units to react swiftly and knowledgably in the event of technology failures. Identifying a need, defining a niche, building an excellent product to fill that niche, and making a partnership that brings added value to the product, these are key ingredients for success. Interlink Software has created a product that operates at a higher and previously unrecognized level of failure analysis.

The choice of central database server was foundational to the architecture of Interlink’s POWERpack product, and taking an embedded server approach would make it even more tightly bound with the product’s future. In selecting a server vendor, Interlink exercised careful due diligence, contacting the companies, acquiring the products, asking questions, and getting a feel for what it would be like to have a long-term working relationship with each company. Whatever vendor they chose, would have a daily effect on Interlink’s products and customers. Long term, the combination of vendor and server would undoubtedly play a part in the success of Interlink. It was a pivotal decision.

Interlink chose Sybase Adaptive Server Enterprise and in doing so, Interlink also chose Sybase as a partner. Sybase ASE had the performance, dependability, and scalability to drive Interlink’s real-time business service monitoring system. And Sybase had a thriving partner program. With continuing success, Interlink’s choice of product and vendor turns out to have been an excellent decision.

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