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AccelOps v1.5 Integrated Monitoring That Cuts through Datacenter Complexity

Review by Mark Brownstein

As a reviewer for the past twenty-plus years, I rarely gush about any product. My aim has always been to give a balanced and honest look at products I'm evaluating. That's the case with the extensive look I took at AccelOps v1.5, an innovative and extremely powerful datacenter monitoring tool that can help organizations get integrated visibility into their infrastructures and enables a service-oriented approach to IT operations. The product is available as a software virtual appliance or software-as-a-service (SaaS).

The headline refers to AccelOps as cutting through datacenter complexity -- and that's what AccelOps does: it captures, analyzes and stores broad information about the network infrastructure and alerts your team about specific conditions affecting availability, performance, security and changes. It also enables staff to search, report and drill down to access relevant status, events, trends, configurations and diagnostic data about your network, network devices, systems, applications and even virtual environments. Better yet, based on IT service groupings, users can immediately prioritize and pinpoint issues affecting the delivery of an IT business service. For example, it will issue an alert on a performance issue regarding e-mail and can isolate a memory allocation problem with the respective database application on the virtualized server associated with the e-mail service.

When I got my first look at AccelOps, I thought that this was just an automated, ITIL-like environment discovery tool with basic performance alerting. Sure, it has a built-in change management database (CMDB) that can do an assay of the environment including automatically categorizing network assets and producing topology maps, but it does a lot more.

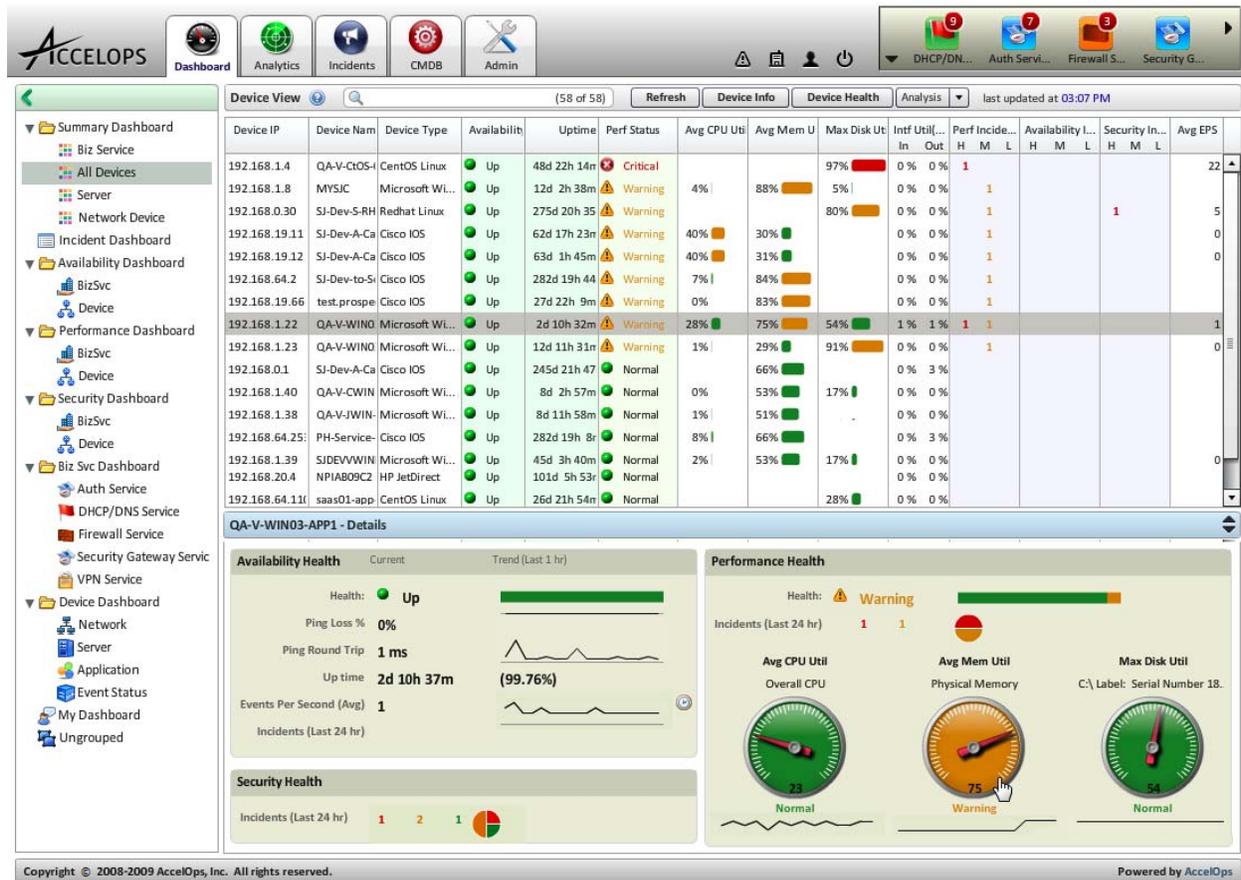


In fact, it captures and monitors much more and in an integrated and well-organized fashion. Think of it as a correlated encyclopedia of your enterprise's operations presented through predefined and customizable dashboards, CMDB, rules, search and reporting features that have value for each member of the IT organization.

You are alerted to an outage or issue right on the spot and can quickly drill down to the underlying details. If you need to know about the top talkers or resource utilization trends in the Accounting subdomain, you flip to the dashboard about the Accounting subdomain. If you want to see who

and what changes were made to a virtual machine (VM) over the past month, select the VM and in seconds (usually) it's there. If you want to investigate security issues or would like a report on performance anomalies over the past four hours or four weeks, click on the incident to jump to a Google-like search feature. Further refine your search, and the information can be made into a report or become a dashboard element.

In regards to reporting, there are over 600 built-in templates that can be tailored to support everything from performance trends to regulatory compliance. Creating or modifying a report doesn't involve coding -- to do this you don't have to be a SQL or GREP geek. The query parameters and object attributes are presented in a very intuitive GUI. The same construct is employed in AccelOps' structured searches as well as rules that define patterns to identify threats, problems and exceptions. The system ships with a broad array of rules -- a means to find correlated events regarding availability, performance, security and change management. While many users will be satisfied with what is included in AccelOps, the rule set is customizable to configure alerts on simple thresholds or more complicated matters.



AccelOps summary dashboard highlighting interactive events and selected Windows server status

While users can put the “enterprise encyclopedia” to good use for getting a handle on network assets, events and generating reports, AccelOps also serves as an operations nerve center for responding to and diagnosing problems. As can be seen in the screenshots, AccelOps provides a real-time status of your enterprise, including specific segments, devices, applications, users or specific groupings called services (which I will get to in a moment). Dynamic tables, color-coded health indicators, icons and topology map connectors can quickly show the status, specific problems, relationships and business impact of activity within the infrastructure. Almost every detail can be further examined. It’s useful. It’s amazing. It’s a whole lot more efficient to identify, collaborate on and investigate a problem in AccelOps than it is to pour over long lists of events or other types of reports that may be provided by other products.

AccelOps includes a simple trouble-ticketing system.

AccelOps also provides business service management functionality taking advantage of the infrastructure details and relationships maintained by the system. The software enables you to create service through a GUI that displays devices, systems and applications from which to add to your logical service group. For example, if you select an application, it will show you a list of systems running that application. When you select the system, it will also select the network devices (eg. switches) associated with the system. This provides a convenient and accurate way to define a service. Once defined, services appear on a “service carousel” from which you can start monitoring and investigating issues affecting services, as well as jump to the respective service dashboard. Here too, a slick

new feature that can be put to good use.

Value On-Premise or In the Cloud

With all that AccelOps does, you may assume that such information wouldn’t be easily retrievable online. To the contrary, I observed that the system is highly responsive and the Adobe Flex Web interface makes for an interactive experience. A management system usually has problems determining information about itself. It’s the old Occam’s Razor at work -- you can’t accurately measure a tool if the tool itself is being used to make the measurements.

With AccelOps, the configuration, log, performance and event data from the entire infrastructure is captured or received from popular devices and applications using available protocols and access means without needing agents. If using their software virtual appliance, all the data is processed and

stored within the system on-premise. Their software-as-a-service (SAAS) provides the same bells and whistles, but in this case, while data is captured and compressed locally via an AccelOps Collector application, it then sends the data encrypted over the Internet to AccelOps for analysis and storage. As in other monitoring tools, alerting supports console, SNMP and SMTP.

This provides a tremendous benefit to IT management and staff. It enables them to log in to AccelOps from any Web browser, and once authenticated, everything is available, including months of online data. So, in a worst-case scenario, your company's e-commerce systems degrades. If you were at your offices, you (or your team) would have to run a variety of management utilities, isolate a few possible sources of the problem and more manually obtain and interpret the data. Having access to the necessary

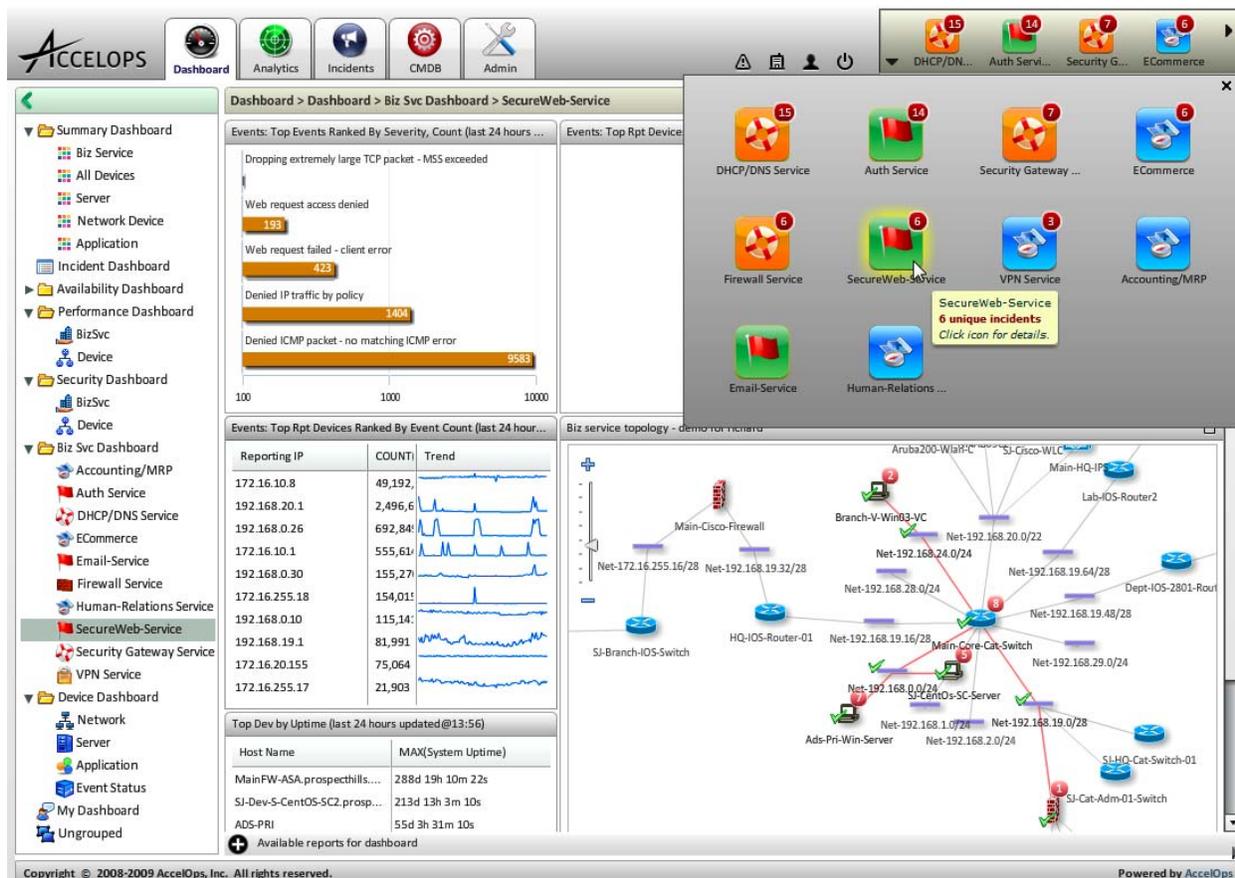
historical data for all devices and systems involved before the failure would be pretty nearly impossible.

Now, imagine when the problem occurs, you were in a conference in another country. Your phone rings -- it's a frantic help desk director on the phone with the business unit GM. From your laptop computer in the conference room, you log onto AccelOps, review the service status, get a hint at the root cause of the problem, use AccelOps to drill down to find the issue immediately before the outage, call the right person to resolve the issue, and relay the necessary details. This is job-saving, cost saving, and for many companies, could even be company saving.

Most of my reviews involve extensive hands-on work with a product. In the case of AccelOps, my small, networked lab would have not done the product justice. Using simulated

data on an AccelOps test environment and also assessing the product in a live datacenter at the Port of San Diego, it appeared that a clear test of the AccelOps capabilities and performance could be achieved. I am confident that the real world information gleaned from the live enterprise was true and complete -- and I was allowed to do my evaluation against a much larger, live infrastructure than the one I was able to provide.

Like any datacenter management product under review constraints, I've barely scratched the surface of what AccelOps can do. It's pretty amazing. It provides a level of integration and resulting correlated data that would be difficult to obtain using other management tools, and the information it provides can be customized as necessary.



AccelOps business service dashboard with service carousel and dynamic topology map

There's so much already in AccelOps that using it may become an art, rather than just science -- there is a lot to learn and discover. Deployment involves installing the AccelOps application as a virtual machine on a VMware ESX platform with specified CPU, memory and local or NFS storage. The configuration wizard for discovery and monitoring is pretty straightforward, and as equal or better than other monitoring products. The product has wizards, online help, a getting-started guide and use-case videos. If I saw a blemish, it's the lack of a conventional user manual (which the vendor promptly told me was coming soon).

AccelOps is available for enterprises as a subscription that includes annual maintenance and support, at a SaaS cost starting at \$2000 a month. For enterprises wanting to keep all the data in-house, an annual fee for the virtual appliance starts at \$40,000. The price goes up depending on the number of systems and applications that will be monitored and the respective data to be managed.

AccelOps can save hundreds of hours a year and could be invaluable in providing early warnings when things start to go south, and enable you to avert costly catastrophe hours or days before it happens. The event correlation, performance and log data management alone facilitates root-cause analysis, investigation, auditing and reports.

In summary, most tools that claim broad functionality often fail to be a master of any domain. AccelOps v1.5 does indeed offer integrated datacenter monitoring, but is quite complete across functional categories. Leaning slightly towards service-oriented management, in the case of AccelOps, it's the sum being worth that much more than its parts. I'm kind of glad that I don't have a network infrastructure that requires the services of AccelOps but, if I did, I would have little hesitation when choosing AccelOps as the tool of choice for stepping up the management and reliability of my datacenter operations.

Scorecard (1-5)	
Usability	4.5
Suitability to Task	5
Performance	4.5
Integration	5
Support	4.5
Overall Value	4.5

Mark Brownstein is an avid writer and product reviewer for such publications as *Computer Technology Review*, *InfoWorld*, *PC Magazine*, *Search Datacenter* and others. Mark was the technology editor at *Network World* and senior technology editor at *Network Magazine*.

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