

Comprehensive Network Health Coverage

Fallon Clinic uses Observer® technology to manage applications and help provide superior patient service

The quality of service Fallon Clinic provides its customers is closely tied to network health. If the network fails or even slows down, customer service suffers. Patients don't like to wait. That's why it's important for Network Engineer Hamid Ali to stay on top of the network and to do so he turns to Network Instruments® Observer technology.

Background

Fallon Clinic has more than 250 physicians practicing in nearly 30 locations throughout Massachusetts. There are a total of 2,500 users that depend on the network, which has its backbone located at the West Boylston site. This core communicates with other offices via point-to-point WAN links. The local networks are built using Fast Ethernet switches. Although the current network is exclusively wired, Fallon plans to implement wireless technology in the near future.

Health of network and health of service

Ali was previously using Network General's Sniffer to monitor the local network. However, as the company grew, he needed to gain WAN visibility. Without that visibility, he couldn't practice comprehensive network management, which could lead to delays in customer service at remote offices. Purchasing another costly product from Network General to manage the WAN wasn't an option. And even if he made the purchase, Sniffer wouldn't provide him with the flexibility to analyze both the WAN and LAN simultaneously from one console. This meant he had to choose to focus on the WAN or the LAN and yet again have problems go undetected and undiagnosed until users began to complain—a problem he had in the first place.

"Purchasing another expensive Sniffer product to monitor the WAN was not an option, especially since it couldn't provide me with all the functionality I needed," Ali said.

Ali started researching other potential network monitoring products and discovered that the technology of the Observer consoles in combination with WAN Probes was the best option for comprehensive management.

"With Observer, I can do it all with one affordable solution," Ali said. "I can monitor both my WAN and LAN at the same time, eliminating the delays in service I was used to dealing with when Sniffer was monitoring the network. Observer makes me more proactive, minimizing user complaints and maximizing customer service."

Long term network care

Ali purchased Observer technology, including a WAN Probe, which he deployed at the core site to monitor and troubleshoot the wired network. With this solution, Ali is able to keep track of WAN links and the LAN simultaneously. He can also monitor and troubleshoot all problems occurring across the WAN circuit, view all WAN link encapsulated data to keep track of link congestion, sense transmission problems, and verify WAN Quality of Service.

As Fallon Clinic's needs grow, Ali can use the same technology he purchased from Network Instruments to monitor network growth. For example, he said management is considering adding wireless capability at some of its locations. If that plan goes through, then he'll need to be able monitor both wired and wireless networks.

"It's nice to know that if we decide to go wireless, Observer already has the ability to manage it," Ali said. "As our network evolves, Observer continues to provide us with the flexibility and top-notch functionality we have come to depend on."

Treating the source rather than the symptoms

Ali needs to quickly detect, diagnose, and solve network problems to ensure first-rate customer service. Too many IT professionals are only putting out fires. Through Observer's triggers and alarms, Ali can set network thresholds that when crossed will alert him via e-mail or page. Therefore, he can prevent fires in the first place.

Recently, Observer notified Ali via e-mail when bandwidth utilization passed the threshold he specified. He immediately pulled up Top Talkers, which easily identified bandwidth-hogging stations and applications. He noted that a recently installed application was a likely suspect. Through Observer's Application Analysis, he identified what types of packets were accounting for the increased bandwidth usage, and when this problem was occurring. Armed with the information obtained from Observer, he was able to treat the problem while it was still in his control and reconfigure the application to prevent that situation in the future.

"Most of the issues we deal with here are tied to application bandwidth," Ali said. "Observer helps us quickly identify the source of each potential application problem, letting us act on it before it spreads like wildfire. Then I prevent that problem from happening in the future by reconfiguring the application. It's a pretty slick tool."

Ali is responsible for managing all segments of the network. Spending too much time on one issue such as troubleshooting a problem application keeps him from addressing other, more pressing issues. With Observer, he is able to promptly troubleshoot problems and move on.

In summary...

About Fallon Clinic

Founded in Massachusetts in 1929, Fallon Clinic has become one of the most dynamic and progressive health care organizations in the country. With more than 250 physicians practicing at 30 locations, staffed by over 1,700 employees, Fallon Clinic provides comprehensive family practice care for more than 1 million patient visits per year.

Challenge

Network Engineer Hamid Ali regularly noticed network slowdown due to application inefficiencies. With Sniffer, it would take him hours to identify and resolve the problem—affecting the service the clinic provided its patients.


Solution

With Observer, Ali was able to identify an application problem in minutes and act upon it immediately, minimizing network slowdown.

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Hamid Ali
Network Engineer
Fallon Clinic



"Ever since I implemented Observer, I have been able to cut troubleshooting down from about five hours per episode to merely minutes," Ali said. "Just with that help, we've been able to quickly realize our ROI." 

About Top Talkers

The Observer Top Talkers display offers a heads-up view of bandwidth utilization by all stations on the network. It also shows detailed traffic flow statistics that can indicate a runaway station, a broadcast/multicast storm, or an unbalanced switch. With this information, network administrators can determine network usage patterns, detect faulty network hardware, and determine what percentage of the network's bandwidth potential each system is using—all from one comprehensive display.

About Triggers and Alarms

Observer's Triggers and Alarms allow administrators to set an alarm for a particular network condition (using customized filters or convenient presets) and trigger an action to occur when the condition is detected. Multiple triggers can be set to run concurrently. Actions can be pop-up windows, printed trouble tickets, or information appended to an event log. Triggers can also be set to execute a user-defined program—such as an e-mail package or paging software. Triggers and Alarms provide instant notification of abnormal network activity and improve response time.

About Application Analysis

Observer offers Application Analysis, a great way to differentiate between network problems and application problems. It brings troubleshooting to the next level by monitoring user experience metrics and by being able to view applications across the entire network. In the past, network administrators have had to purchase separate tools to monitor applications and traffic. Observer does both.

About Network Instruments, LLC

Network Instruments is the industry-leading developer of distributed, user-friendly and affordable network management, analysis and troubleshooting solutions. The award-winning Observer family of products combines a comprehensive management and analysis console with high-performance probes and network TAPs to provide integrated monitoring and management for the entire network (LAN, 802.11 a/b/g, gigabit, WAN). All Network Instruments products are designed utilizing a Distributed Network Analysis (NI-DNA™) architecture. With NI-DNA, the Observer solution set simplifies network troubleshooting and management, optimizes network and application performance and scales to meet the needs of any organization. Founded in 1994, Network Instruments is headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota with offices in London, Munich, Paris, Toronto, and multiple cities throughout the United States with distributors in over 50 countries. More information about the company, products, innovation, technology, NI-DNA, becoming a partner, and NI University can be found at: www.networkinstruments.com.

About Fallon Clinic

Founded in 1929 by Dr. John Fallon and a team of local physicians, Fallon Clinic was central Massachusetts' first group practice. As one of the most dynamic and progressive health care organizations in the country today, Fallon Clinic continues to achieve some of the highest quality of care ratings in the country. We are leaders in health care delivery innovation, transforming patient care paradigms, and establishing a new "gold standard" in patient care service. With more than 250 physicians practicing in nearly 30 locations, Fallon Clinic provides comprehensive care for more than one million patient visits a year, and is the largest private, multi-specialty group in central Massachusetts.

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-Hamid Ali

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