



The challenge of managing performance in a complex system serving diverse markets

VISUAL Control Center:
VISUAL Control for Jobs, VISUAL Control for Pools
VISUAL Control for Windows and VISUAL Support Pro
VISUAL Control Performance Planner

...about the Company

Fortis Bank Commercial Finance is a cross-border oriented asset based service provider, today present in 9 countries and connected to the important international factoring network Factors Chain International.

It has operations in 8 European countries: Belgium, the Netherlands, France, UK, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and Poland, and it employs around 440 persons. Outside Europe an operation in Hong Kong is started, currently under the flag of Fortis Bank Hong Kong. In Portugal and Spain FCF co-operates with other factoring companies ("la Caixa" and Heller).

The problem

"In our business, having customers on the telephone for more than five minutes before they get the information they want is a serious business problem," says Jimmy van Kerkvoorde, IT Manager at Fortis Bank Commercial Finance. "In the worst case scenario, if a system failure brought our system down, financial losses resulting from not serving our customers would account for several million euros in a single day."

With this in mind, it is easy to understand why iSeries performance management ranks first among FBCF's technical concerns. Especially after last year, when response times began surpassing the two-second threshold established at the IT department's Service Level Agreement (SLA), and peaked at five seconds or more during the execution of certain processes involving complex SQL sentences. Even worse, abusive consumption of CPU capacity at a single subsystem (that is, at a single subsidiary)



Version 8.0 of VISUAL Control for Windows (VCW), Tango/04's system performance monitoring console, helped FBCF graphically view all key performance metrics of its two iSeries servers, allowing the IT department to keep an eye on disk usage, response times and a list of the most CPU-consuming processes taking place at any moment.

The VCW console also proved to be an easy means to assess the convenience of the performance tuning agents included within the solution: VISUAL Control for Jobs and VISUAL Control for Pools. These modules react instantly to variations in system usage and performance metrics, dynamically reassigning system resources to determined memory pools, and modifying job priorities, in order to optimize the overall performance of FBCF's hardware as business requirements change in every country, at any given time of the day, or due to any periodic or exceptional business process. "Enhanced response times and accomplishment of Service Level Agreements were visible right from the start of the product trial," explains Jimmy. "The systems' average response time immediately plunged to less than one second, which is half the maximum time established at our SLA."

Even queries being executed by users worldwide, whose complexity was clearly affecting system performance, could be spotted and analyzed using the VCW "cockpit" console. The team at the IT Department could then drill-down to any given event related to SQL sentences, capture the job causing the drop in performance, and even read the last SQL line being executed using the VISUAL Support Pro 5.0 module, thus being able to solve certain programming problems and resume business as usual.

Once the VISUAL Control Center solution was fully implemented at Fortis, PST helped the company set up predefined alarms that allow Jimmy and his colleagues to receive an E-Mail alert every time a performance threshold is reached. For instance, a custom message with detailed information is broadcast to the IT team of four every time DASD occupation surpasses the designated 80% limit, allowing personnel to take appropriate action before disk occupation becomes a serious problem.

"I say to any company now trying to figure-out how to overcome an iSeries performance challenge 'Try VISUAL Control!'," Jimmy concludes. "Do the test drive for a couple months or so, and you will see the results. If you see the results I saw in our systems, no doubt, you'll buy it."

"Do the test drive for a couple months or so, and you will see the results. If you see the results I saw in our systems, no doubt, you'll buy it."

Performance Manager/400 (PM400), a tool provided with the iSeries' operating system, proved to be useful at measuring critical performance data required to monitor system performance. However, FBCF needed a more powerful solution to convert that data into useful information.

Quick, graphical views of events, as well as broadcast alerts to allow unattended system supervision, were two key requirements. "Calls from our users complaining about poor response times were the only means we had to know there was a performance problem," Jimmy recalls. So he and his team began searching the market for solutions capable of improving the service levels of the bank's system.

The solution

PST Business Solutions BV, Tango/04's Business Partner in the Netherlands, offered FBCF a one-month product trial of VISUAL Control Center, a suite of iSeries performance management software encompassing a monitoring module with alert and charting capabilities, two different system performance tuners, and a tool that allows operators to analyze, in real-time, SQL sentences thought to be behind certain performance problems.