

Gaming & Hospitality Case Study

Treasure Island Hotel & Casino

BACKGROUND

Dominic Vacca, IT Executive Director for Treasure Island Hotel & Casino, leads a 16-person team that supports over 100 servers, nearly 200 network devices, and over 3,000 employees. "We implement and support nearly every piece of technology at the property, and Treasure Island requires continuous uptime, especially when it comes to guest services," says Vacca.

When MGM Mirage sold the property in 2009, Treasure Island had to build its own technology support team, and they've been growing and refining it ever since. Says Vacca, "It's been a challenge to build our support systems, but it's been rewarding. We have a solid team in place, and we're proud of what we've accomplished over the last few years."

THE CHALLENGE

Like most gaming and hospitality organizations, Treasure Island has a wide array of complex systems that are totally dependent on their technology infrastructure. "Even a very small problem with a network device, server, or application could result in a serious disruption to our business," says Vacca. "Our IT staff is tasked with managing a very complex set of interdependent systems which requires the use of complex tools for monitoring, alerting, and reporting."

Treasure Island used standard off-the-shelf monitoring and alerting tools including Microsoft's System Center Operations Manager (SCOM) and WhatsUp Gold, but their staff used these tools reactively; when something went wrong, they would use the tools to determine where the problem was. Due to their other activities and responsibilities, it was difficult for them to set up the tools for proactive monitoring, as these tools usually require a full time person to take advantage of all of their built-in capabilities.

Dominic Vacca began looking for a way to allow his staff to continue focusing on their daily activities, while improving IT services through a more proactive approach. "Our IT department shouldn't be in the business of managing complex infrastructure management tools, we should be serving the IT needs of the business." says Vacca. This led him to look for a service provider to manage the monitoring, alerting, and reporting of his infrastructure. Along with these functions, he also wanted a service provider to provide help desk services to give Treasure Island improved metrics on the types of calls they were receiving, as well as alleviating the need for PBX to log and route IT calls.

A significant hurdle for any service provider to overcome is the Gaming Control Board's strict regulations of gaming-related applications. Ideally, Treasure Island wanted an IT service provider who could participate in the management of the regulated systems.

THE SOLUTION

Treasure Island contacted NetEffect, a 10-year-old Las Vegas based IT service firm. NetEffect provides outsourced IT solutions to organizations throughout the Las Vegas valley. "If you're going to provide great service to disparate networks and organizations all over the valley, you have to master some pretty sophisticated Enterprise-class tools," says NetEffect CEO and Founder Jeff Grace. "We've invested a lot of time and money over the years developing our processes to effectively monitor, manage and report on a wide array of system conditions for our clients."

NetEffect offers what they call "Streamline/IT" to supplement organizations with in-house IT. "We partner with clients to provide their in-house IT staff with the tools they need to more effectively manage their IT assets, as well as a customized ticketing solution that greatly benefits the IT staff, the organization's end users, and management. The tools we use are typically out of reach of most organizations," says Grace. With NetEffect and their clients working in the same ticketing system, NetEffect seamlessly picks up the overflow, whether from skillset gaps or staff shortages. "Streamline/IT enables our clients with in-house IT to accomplish a lot more with a lot less," says Grace.

"NetEffect clearly had the experience and expertise we were looking for," says Tim Frawley, an IT consultant working with Treasure Island, "they had a genuine interest in learning our systems and processes, as well as the willingness to apply for a gaming license, which is no small task." On December 22, 2011, the Nevada Gaming Commission amended Regulation 5, allowing for licensure of IT service providers to work on gaming-related systems. "This was a perfect alignment of opportunity and one of our core competencies," says Grace, "I knew we could hit this out of the park." NetEffect completed the rigorous application process in three months, and was the first IT service provider to be granted a gaming license by the Nevada Gaming Commission on July 26, 2012.

As a licensed IT service provider, NetEffect can monitor the services or processes tied to gaming-related applications, automatically restart them if they stop, as well as proactively alert IT staff 24x7. The data collected also allows NetEffect to provide availability and performance reports on these applications. "The gaming license allows us to go far beyond up/down status, drive space, CPU, and memory," says Grace. "We can help gaming properties achieve better uptime of their gaming applications, and the superior historical data allows gaming operators to allocate their resources much more effectively and hold vendors accountable when systems have chronic problems."

THE IMPLEMENTATION

Treasure Island requested from NetEffect network monitoring, alerting, and reporting, as well as call center services, and helpdesk ticketing. “After several meetings, Treasure Island and NetEffect agreed upon the objectives and timeline, and started working on the implementation right away,” says Frawley. “We wanted everything implemented in 60 days, and NetEffect hit that goal exactly.”

Treasure Island allocated a dedicated virtual server to NetEffect, which served as the platform for all of the monitoring, alerting, and reporting. The gateway server collects information from all Treasure Island servers, and network devices, and transmits encrypted information to NetEffect’s central server at the

Switch SuperNAP, where it’s processed. “It’s a pretty simple concept,” says NetEffect Senior Engineer Stuart Rowe, “but the scale of it is massive. We’re collecting thousands of pieces of information every minute, and the biggest challenge is to actually do something meaningful with the data.” The data is assembled into weekly and monthly availability reports, and thresholds are set to alert Treasure Island staff immediately when a dangerous system threshold is met.

NetEffect also answers all of Treasure Island’s IT support calls 24x7. Rather than having Treasure Island’s PBX operators field these calls, NetEffect’s sole focus on IT allows them to assemble much clearer information for in-house IT staff to act on.

NetEffect also provides Treasure Island with an Enterprise-class ticketing system customized exactly for their use. “The ticketing system provides a lot of value to us,” says Pete Small, Treasure Island Information Technology Operations Manager, “now we know how much time our techs are working on support tickets and we can generate reports that quickly identify the top issues. Our service tickets are customized to where we can even see which software packages are giving us the most trouble. It’s easy to see where our biggest problems are.”

NetEffect also performs all patch management for Treasure Island servers. Their automated system allows this to be performed more efficiently, freeing up valuable time for Treasure Island’s IT staff.

THE RESULT

The result of Treasure Island partnering with NetEffect is a technology partnership Treasure Island can leverage for greater efficiencies, higher system availability, and valuable information to properly allocate resources. Treasure Island gets access to best-in-class monitoring and management tools, and they leave the complex management and configuration tasks of that software to the experts at NetEffect.

“I’ve wanted to partner with a technology service provider for years,” says Vacca, “we’re very good at managing IT, but we operate in relatively isolated way. Now we have access to tools and information we’ve never had before. And the fact that NetEffect is licensed by the Nevada Gaming Commission allows them to help with the systems that matter most to Treasure Island.”

NETEFFECT: “YOUR PARTNER IN GAMING TECHNOLOGY”

NetEffect (www.neteffect-it.com) is a leading provider of technology support, consulting, and managed services. NetEffect was founded in Las Vegas, NV in 2002, and has strong ties to the Southern NV business community. All of our staff members are qualified and trained to provide a high level of expertise.

On July 26, 2012, NetEffect became the first Information Technology service provider to be granted a gaming license by the Nevada Gaming Commission. NetEffect’s gaming license allows them to monitor, manage, and support systems regulated by the Nevada Gaming Commission.