

Monitoring Business Critical Product Flows at Clas Ohlson



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Jan Larsson, IT Security Manager at Clas Ohlson

EFFICIENT LOGISTIC FLOWS THE KEY TO HIGH SERVICE LEVELS

The mail order business started by Clas Ohlson in Swedish Insjön in 1918 is today an established European retail business. Over four thousand employees work by the company motto, “making things easier for people to solve their everyday practical problems”.

At Clas Ohlson, store service levels, defined as having products available when customers want them, is a key performance indicator for company success. The challenge is that inventories tie up capital and a high turnover is a must to secure profitability and continued growth. No store therefore keeps an individual stock, with all products available on company shelves only. To balance high service levels with low inventories all products sold in any of the stores are scanned and registered using barcodes. Orders are automatically passed on to the central distribution centre. Every night a close to fully automated system make sure that orders are put together for every store and delivered from the central warehouse.

SOPHISTICATED IT SOLUTION

Clas Ohlson's Swedish headquarters are not only the base for its worldwide distribution network but also the company IT department. In addition to operation and support of all internal IT, the department manages the development of business support applications that control the flow of goods.

Three IT-systems together form the core of Clas Ohlson's advanced logistics and sales system managing over 15,000 products sold in 174 physical stores as well as in the Clas Ohlson online store. The central ERP-system with its database handles information regarding all articles, customers and suppliers. A store system manages information about flows in and between the stores. To every store a POS system is connected handling all sales transactions. All systems are tied together using Microsoft BizTalk Server as the transaction engine for all flows in the company.

Already in 2003 Clas Ohlson IT realized that a professional monitoring solution was must to secure the availability of the highly automated and sophisticated logistic system. Even the shortest period of downtime would directly impact Clas Ohlson's business. The same year the decision was made to implement the op5 Monitor Enterprise solution.

REPORTING CATCHES PROBLEMS BEFORE THEY BECOME PROBLEMS

Today Clas Ohlson benefits from a robust and reliable system for monitoring the complete IT and supply environment covering 650 devices and in total 4,700 monitoring points. Shop POS terminals are business critical for Clas Ohlson and must be able to function even during total interruption. Each terminal is therefore equipped with a local SQL-based article database where all receipts are stored until they are forwarded to the business system. All points where receipts can fail are monitored to make sure nothing will stop the flow and that queues are not too long, op5 Monitor is also used for passive monitoring of cash terminals and to prevent disks running out of space.

Thanks to trend reporting, Clas Ohlson IT can work proactively to maximize system uptime. The report generator of op5 Monitor gives Clas Ohlson has continuous access to performance graphs. This allows them to keep track of disk space and a number of other trends, meaning they can take action before capacity-related bottlenecks develop into real problems.

The most recent enhancement to the monitoring solution has been to introduce a load balancing solution. In this way Clas Ohlson can minimize vulnerability and risk for disruptions in the automated flows.

A DECADE OF FLEXIBLE MONITORING AND CLOSE COOPERATION

As the solution has evolved over time to meet business needs, the Clas Ohlson IT department has come to highly appreciate its flexibility:

– op5 Monitor is a very convenient product to work with, yet it is extremely flexible when it comes to adaptations, both in the form of plug-ins and other functionality, explains Jan Larsson, IT Security Manager at Clas Ohlson.

Most system adaptations have been managed by the internal IT-department. For more advanced projects, such as the tight integration between the monitoring system and the Microsoft BizTalk Server, Clas Ohlson has tapped into op5's advanced skills on a consultancy basis.

– The helpful staff at op5 have always provided great support and quick response to our needs, Jan Larsson concludes.



Jan Larsson, IT Security Manager, Clas Ohlson

CHALLENGE:

Monitoring of applications, servers, communication equipment and logistics flows in BizTalk, in a mission-critical environment.

OP5 SOLUTION:

op5 Monitor connected to 4700 monitoring points. Report module for proactive monitoring management and load balancing for 99.999% uptime.

RESULT:

Clas Ohlson can act quickly and with very precise response to disruptions, and they can catch the problems before they causes interferences.

ABOUT OP5 AB

op5 offers server-monitoring solutions that help IT gain control over their operations and deliver IT-services for better business. op5 monitors everything from small but business critical IT environments to the very largest organizations with distributed hardware, applications and services. op5 customers around the world appreciate fully supported solutions that are open and easy to get started with, yet flexible for future needs.

For more information, see www.op5.com. Follow us on Twitter: @op5ab



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