

HootSuite Media, Inc. Ansible Case Study

Organization:

HootSuite is a social media management system for businesses and organizations to collaboratively execute campaigns across multiple social networks from one secure, web-based dashboard. More than 75% of Fortune 1000 companies now use HootSuite for social media management, social marketing, social customer service, and social selling. Customers include PepsiCo, Virgin, FOX, Sony Music, and WWF.

Ansible user:

Beier Cai, Director of Technology

What is your business challenge?

Our infrastructure is not scripted, repeatable or immutable. Rebuilding a server relies on limited documentation and mostly memory. Lack of repeatability makes automating our infrastructure and application deployment difficult.

How is Ansible being used?

We mostly use Ansible core at this time. We currently are applying Ansible to all of our servers, so we can build any server from scratch and repeat this as many times as we want to. Our future plan is to use Ansible for app deployment, and maybe even ad hoc production server management.

What technology or products did you use in the past to solve this problem, if any?

We had limited experience with Puppet, but didn't quite like it because 1) it needs agents, and we don't like agents; and 2) we favor immutability over snowflake factory for infrastructure management.

Have you had enough experience with Ansible to determine qualitative and/or quantitative results?

Qualitative:

- 1) Ops and devs both feel safer, literally. Before they were always worried about 'what if the server dies'. They aren't worried about this anymore after all servers are properly 'Ansiblized'.
- 2) With the help of Vagrant we can test server builds locally as many times as we want until it works, instead of testing it on EC2 cloud which is remote and always slow.



"In the beginning I didn't realize Ansible is good for orchestration as well, but found it out quickly and I really loved it as it beats competitors right there."

- Beier Cai, Director of Technology
HootSuite Media, Inc.



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3) Ansible makes engineers more productive because lots of system libraries and packages are shared among different server types, and as we take advantage of Ansible's 'shared' Playbook they don't have to repeat the same lib/package install over and over again.

Quantitative:

1) As far as I remember we were burned at least 3 times by not being able to rebuild the server exactly the way it was (sometimes Amazon just terminated an instance without us knowing). There was one time we had to spend over a month of an engineer's time to rebuild a server that had lived for 2 years with random config changes by ops engineers along the way, with limited documentation. By Ansiblizing all of our servers, incidents like this will be literally Zero.

2) Increase our bus factor from 1 to infinite! Before only 1 or 2 people know how a server was built from the beginning. With Ansible, storing playbooks in source control gives everyone the ability to rebuild the server at any time.

Were there any unexpected surprises?

At the beginning I didn't realize Ansible is good for orchestration as well, but found it out quickly and really loved it. Ansible beats competitors right there (for example, Puppet had to rely MCollective for orchestration, which is a whole new cluster of multiple system to setup, tedious!).

Any plans to grow your Ansible usage moving forward?

We want to build out "Devops" into HootSuite, and our vision is "*Software Engineers are engaged in the Entire Cycle of designing, implementing, Deploying and maintaining their software across All Environments*". Ansible will play key part in terms of building repeatable and immutable infrastructure, build tools for automation and giving engineers the ability to provision and manage servers in any environment.

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