

PROACTIVE MONITORING SOLUTION INCREASES UPTIME AND REDUCES HEADCOUNT INVESTMENT



RentDynamics serves real estate management companies for apartments and multifamily housing by offering a software platform that captures and manages leads. Their platform ensures that properties are occupied by offering services that generate, capture and nurture leads as well as the tools to ensure that apartments stay occupied. Since 2015, RentDynamics has grown from a single customer to over 100 clients managing over a half of a million apartment units.

THE NEED: AUTOMATED ALERTING TO PROACTIVELY IDENTIFY PROBLEMS

Skyler Cain leads the technical team of seventeen people, managing the entire technology stack including product development, roadmap, internal IT, and operations. On top of Cain's management responsibilities, he is fully responsible for the DevOps tasks. To date, RentDynamics has focused on hiring for and investing in development so the DevOps responsibilities have fallen to Cain. "For now, it's still on my shoulders just as a solo guy," says Cain.

As a result of having these broad responsibilities, Cain is stretched very thin. Prior to adopting Blue Matador, the RentDynamics team was using a traditional monitoring tool that specializes in visualizations and dashboards. The challenge for Cain was that he didn't have time or capacity to set up alerts with this tool. Says Cain, "we had all this data feeding into our previous monitoring tool, but it was like somebody had to go look at the tool. Remember, it was just me and I didn't have the time to go in and set up rules and alerts and configure this entire environment to interpret our data and give us meaningful information."

"Our previous monitoring solution was actually more of a burden on us because we had to put resources into developing dashboards and alerts."

As a result of not having proper alerts set up (due to how cumbersome their previous tool was to configure), Cain and team often found out about performance issues from customers. Cain explains, "In the past there was really no way to get alerted except from our users if we did have an outage. We would wait to hear from a client. The state we were in before Blue Matador was very embarrassing because when stuff would go down someone else would typically find out before us."

INCREASED UPTIME WHILE REDUCING HEADCOUNT INVESTMENT

Since adopting Blue Matador, Cain is now the first to know of any issues due to Blue Matador's proactive and automatic monitoring approach. Says Cain, "So before a client tells us, 'Hey, all four of your instances are down,' Blue Matador tells us, 'Two of your instances are down and two are gonna be overloaded.' We can start working on that problem much sooner before the client sees the impact."

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Maintain high uptime and performance while reducing the needed investment in DevOps headcount and tooling

SOLUTION

Blue Matador automatically and proactively provides all AWS alerts, enabling the RentDynamics team to increase uptime while maintaining their lean investment in DevOps

RESULTS

- Moved from reactively addressing issues raised by customers, to proactively resolving potential issues before customers are affected
- Maintained lean investment in DevOps, enabling continued focus on feature development
- Reduced mean time to resolution by correlating alerts to identify underlying issues
- Reduced QA cycles and increased speed to market due to increased visibility and confidence in the system's health



Cain can now know of and proactively address potential issues; he and his team now have lead time well before a client is affected. He explains, “we usually start working on a problem 5 to 15 minutes before it is reported to us [by customers] and typically the problem is resolved before we hear about it, which is awesome.”

Due to adopting Blue Matador, RentDynamics has been able to limit their investment in DevOps and continue to invest in development and releasing new features. As Cain explains, “we’ve been able to kick the DevOps can down the road and half of a person’s time can manage it. Where I think without that you would need at least one to two people to manage your DevOps without Blue Matador.” Cain has seen a tendency for small and growing companies to hire a junior employee with limited experience to manage the DevOps responsibilities, but in Cain’s assessment using Blue Matador is a viable alternative. He explains, “If you’re growing, Blue Matador serves that role very well. I can tell you Blue Matador is going to outperform the person that doesn’t have a lot of experience. You’re better off to get Blue Matador.”

“Where you guys pull in data and actually draw correlations and give us useful information, it’s invaluable. I would need to hire a couple people to do Blue Matador’s job.”

Blue Matador has also enabled the developers on Cain’s team to take more ownership of the health of the system. This has been vital due to their limited DevOps resources. For instance, Cain will frequently receive Slack messages from his dev team with links from Blue Matador and messages like, “Hey, we have unhealthy hosts, let’s fix that beforehand.” This has been a huge time saver for Cain because his day is interrupted much less frequently trying to hunt down issues. The developers on his team are now empowered to proactively address these issues. In Cain’s own words: “The fact that people outside DevOps are paying attention to the Blue Matador notifications and also holding them accountable to those notifications has been super helpful. They can now go to Blue Matador first and make sure everything looks good before they need to come to me with the issue.”

PROACTIVE MONITORING REDUCES MEAN TIME TO RESOLUTION



For the first time, Cain has been able to correlate issues across RentDynamics’s environment due to Blue Matador’s timeline feature. Now when he receives an alert, he is able to see the other anomalies in context which enables him to identify the underlying issues. For example, when they first adopted Blue Matador, Cain recognized a correlation between unhealthy load balancers and high load on his database. He explains, “Every time we went unhealthy on this load balancer, our database is also at 90%. And so being able to easily see that correlation and know that the servers aren’t

going unhealthy for any reason, it’s because the database is paged and it’s causing this ripple effect. So being able to see how one resource affects other resources has been the main way we use it to pinpoint issues. Being able to correlate obscure things like that, that I normally wouldn’t see and I wouldn’t pay attention to, has been very helpful.”

In the past, Cain often felt like his team was the last to know; now his team addresses issues proactively. Some examples that Cain references include increasing instance sizes due to the traffic spike they were seeing (“You guys helped us see that need before an issue happened,” says Cain) and proactively notifying that their Kinesis streams were either streaming less or no events were going through. As a result, Cain and team are able to stay ahead of the curve like never before.

“You save just an incredible amount of time because you don’t have to configure Blue Matador”

LOOKING FORWARD: MOVING TO MICROSERVICES WITH INCREASED VELOCITY

Blue Matador has enabled RentDynamics to deploy code more frequently and with more confidence. To date, they have not invested in a dedicated QA team, so it is expensive and time consuming for their developers to extensively test before releasing code. Now they release code with more confidence knowing that they will be notified if anything is trending negatively since the last release. Says Cain, “We know we had a safety net with Blue Matador to help us. We’re now more in the mindset of, ‘hey let’s push it and then let’s keep an eye on Blue Matador,’ rather than releasing and monitoring (i.e. babysitting) the system to see if any unoptimized code made it into production that our test suite missed.”

Looking to the future, RentDynamics is likely going to move to microservices environment by running containers on Amazon’s Elastic Container Service (ECS). Cain is much more confident making this transition to a microservices environment due to Blue Matador’s automated monitoring and alerting of ECS. “It will be crucial to have Blue Matador watching those containers and seeing how those services are performing when we move that way. And then it’ll be really nice to just have all of this information consolidated into one place because sure we’ll have CloudWatch turned on, and yes, we have all these logs in AWS, but again, we don’t have the manpower to go and look at all of that.”

As RentDynamics’ platform continues to expand, deepen, and serve more and more customers, Blue Matador is enabling the team to maintain high uptime and performance while continuing to focus on development and feature development.

“I love to see your product evolve. Every time I check-in with the Blue Matador team, it seems like the product gets better.”