PRTG: Helping STL Communications Keep Their Customers Fully Connected at All Times

In the more than 30 years since STL Communications first began installing and marketing equipment from AT&T, the St. Louis-based managed service provider, integrator, networking firm and IT consultancy has guided its customers through the radical changes shaping how businesses communicate and stay connected. Today, the company's customers, which include firms from across industries, rely on STL as the trusted partner with the expertise they need to effectively use the most productive technologies.

"We help our customers use technology to serve their customers even better by providing the best voice, data, wireless, video and infrastructure solutions available," says Steve Leidholdt, founder, president and CEO of STL. "We guide them through the systems and technologies required to be successful in business today."

While STL traces its heritage to voice communications, over the years its offerings increased to encompass the wide range of networks, software, hardware and software today's companies need. These include more advanced protocols for voice communications such as Session Initiation Protocol or SIP.

"In many of these disciplines, the complexity of the components involved has increased in line with the benefits of adoption," adds Leidholdt. "SIP is a great example. The savings and performance gains are extensive, but it's too complex for most organizations to handle alone. For that reason, many of our customers turn to us for a complete managed service."

Of course, STL demands 100 percent uptime for the infrastructure it uses to deliver managed services, which often include products and technologies from multiple vendors working together. As the volume of these services grew, the team knew it needed to augment its existing network monitoring capabilities.

STL Communications' Mobile Learning Center is loaded with the latest communications technology, providing businesses, executives and IT teams with an opportunity to see firsthand how advancements, and the technology superheroes behind them, effectively battle the technology villains.

Specifically, it needed a solution that would show not only the performance of STL's infrastructure in real time, but also the granular details required to immediately identify potential problems, and in the event an issue arises, quickly troubleshoot the cause. The technology also needed to be a highly flexible product able to monitor solutions from the vendors and partners STL works with that is highly customizable and able to function flawlessly in numerous environments. This included its integration with customers' legacy infrastructure. Finally, it had to be cost effective and be something that STL could confidently recommend to customers for internal usage.

STL had always monitored its infrastructure, but the product it used was expensive. More importantly, it didn't offer the flexibility needed to deploy it in diverse environments or to configure it for specific use cases. Leidholdt and the team at STL were drawn to PRTG Network Monitor because of the ability it gave them to oversee their entire infrastructure and view what matters most at any given point in time all in a glance at dashboards that are easily configured to show the most salient information.

"As all sysadmins know, things break and things fail. Once we had PRTG in place, it became apparent that not only would we be the first ones to know if problems arose in our customers' systems, but our teams could troubleshoot them much faster," says Chris Illingworth, vice president of inside sales and datacenter at STL. "Highly qualified IT people can fix most problems, but that takes time, and management and customers have no patience for slowdowns or interruptions in service. PRTG enables our experts to proactively identify and address any developments in the network that might create a problem, and if an issue arises, find the root cause much faster. It's all about fast action and 100 percent uptime."

For these reasons, PRTG was selected. Paessler offers more than 200 pre-configured, purpose-built sensors and custom sensors can be added as needed.

PRTG was promptly put to use and the company's engineers immediately found it valuable. When any of the pre-determined performance thresholds they put in place are met - for example a server reaching a specific capacity level, a camera losing connectivity, a fan in a disk-powered storage appliance showing signs of fatigue, etc. - PRTG sends an alert in the format each engineer prefers, including email or SMS. PRTG can also be configured to automatically launch applications or contingency protocols whenever an alert is issued.

Helping Companies of All Kinds Communicate and Operate More Effectively

Modern voice-technology systems are some of the most popular ones STL Communications designs, sells, supports and maintains for customers. Not surprisingly, STL invested heavily in the production and delivery infrastructure required to provide reliable, high quality telephony and cloud services. The company's infrastructure is noteworthy. Over the past five years Avaya named STL Partner of the Year, not just once, but three times. STL is also a diamond status Avaya partner.

Nursecall - Effective Communications for Better Patient Care

In 2018, Paessler unveiled the first comprehensive network monitoring offering for the healthcare industry, and the only product to feature sensors designed for the Digital Imaging and Communications in Medicine (DICOM) and Health Level Seven International (HL7) protocols used by hospitals and medical device and software manufacturers worldwide.

Maintaining the 100 percent uptime of mission-critical systems is imperative in any environment, but it takes on a new level of urgency and importance in hospitals. One of STL Communications most popular managed services is Total Nursecall, a solution that helps hospitals enable more effective communications between clinical staff members and patients.

Hospitals must have a dedicated, independent nurse call system in place by regulation. Total Nursecall addresses that requirement, but includes additional functionality that not only eclipses the reliability of traditional systems, but also puts more information at the fingertips of operational teams, IT departments and, most importantly, caregivers. Most critical access hospitals can even be reimbursed for the operating expense of the solution.

When the patient pushes the nursecall button at their bedside, the request goes to the hospital's Electronic Health Records (EHR) system where important information on the patient's condition, medications, allergies or other pertinent information is incorporated into the request. It's then sent through the phone system and a wireless network to a handset kept on the belts of all clinical staff members.

Providing its customers with a managed service that addresses all of their voice-communications needs is only one aspect of the value STL delivers to customers. The company also serves as a trusted partner able to address the full range of customers' networking needs, including routing and switching, as well as creating, managing and maintaining the systems required for storage, backup and recovery and virtualization.

PRTG is used in all of these endeavors.

"We use PRTG in innumerable ways in what usually are several different scenarios," says Leidholdt. "When a customer wants a managed service deployment running on our infrastructure, we of course use it to monitor our systems. And if a customer has a highly complex network and engages with us for consulting and subject matter expertise we will use PRTG in our work. Finally, when a customer wants a full-fledged managed service we include PRTG as a core component in our offering."

The system also features real-time location services that identify which nurse will be alerted and in the event of an urgent situation, which caregiver is closest while also communicating the patient's level of pain and other details. PRTG is used to monitor the entire system.

The team at STL also use PRTG's auto discovery capability, which identifies everything attached to the network, in the original assessments it conducts for prospective customers. The results are often surprising and sometimes identify fundamental problems with the network that need to be addressed.

STL's engineers use numerous PRTG sensors in their work monitoring many variables, including everything from disk space capacity, CPU usage, read/write speeds and even the RPMs of fans in specific servers. They also use the inherent flexibility of PRTG to create dashboards and custom sensors as needed. This includes the creation of sensors for customers' legacy systems that while no longer in production, are still economical to use.

Notably, many of the pre-configured sensors that come with PRTG and which were in many cases created in close collaboration with the vendor, are directly applicable to STL's offerings. This includes networking gear from Aruba Networks and Extreme Networks, video and video surveillance gear from numerous manufacturers, disk and flash storage systems from Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE), backup and disaster recovery technology from Veeam and virtualization ⊠ including hyper-converged infrastructure, software-defined-data centers, data center virtualization and cloud infrastructure from VMware.

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"Virtualization is a great example of the countless ways that PRTG can be used," adds Leidholdt. "Paessler provides a number of sensors designed specifically for VMware's products that provide enterprises with the peace of mind of knowing that their

virtualized infrastructure is performing as it should. PRTG can also be used to determine typical CPU and memory load, disk usage and other factors that demonstrate how applications use network resources. This information can be of exceptional value when planning virtualization efforts."

Most importantly, PRTG is an asset that aligns well with the core philosophy that has guided STL Communications since its founding.

"Our goal has always been to be a trusted partner, not a vendor to our customers, and that's how Paessler treats us as well," said Leidholdt. "Any channel provider can sell products. Expertise and customer service are what set firms apart. The visibility PRTG makes possible enables us to be much more effective and to act quickly based not on what we think, but what we know to be true in our customers' systems and networks. With it we can also help our customers be better at

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their jobs by showing them exactly what's in their infrastructure and how it's performing. The reality is that if you aren't monitoring your IT infrastructure, or having someone you trust do so for you, you have no idea what's going on in your house – and when you do have a problem, you're not going to know where to look to fix it."