



Hines Associates Recovers Resources and Improves Bottom Line with Solutions from RTO Software

“With RTO Software we basically don’t have surprises in the morning anymore.”

Carl Valiulis, Director of Information Technology, Hines Associates

At a Glance

■ Business Challenge

After a hardware upgrade, Hines’ customers had growing frustrations about system lag times—resulting in lost revenue and increased support costs for the managed care service provider.

■ Solution

Hines deployed RTO TScale™ and RTO PinPoint™ and within a day discovered the culprit—Hines’ anti-virus software. Since installing RTO’s software, Hines is able to be more proactive and has not experienced any hiccups in performance.

■ Benefits

- Gained control over critical applications
- Improved customer service
- Reduced headcount dedicated to server monitoring
- Maintained maximum billable time
- Helped prioritize resources with multi-level alerts
- Achieved effective server upgrade migration testing

About Hines Associates

Hines Associates is an independent managed care company based in Elgin, Illinois, with more than 130 employees supporting patients, providers and payors from over 30 call center locations across the United States. Hines provides medical management services including utilization review, case management, disease management and peer review for self-funded employers, insurance carriers, PPOs, third-party administrators, funds and municipalities.

Business Challenge

After the last hardware upgrade, Hines customers began complaining about lag times on server-based applications.

“This had been going on for eight months and we couldn’t identify the problem,” explained Carl Valiulis, Director of Information Technology for Hines Associates. “The server got locked in a high process mode for 2–30 minutes and none of the users were able to accomplish much beyond their basic tasks.”

What frustrated Valiulis was that his team of IT administrators would look at the processes on the servers and find they were basically taking over the CPU. “Worst of all, when we had these lockups we wouldn’t be notified until a nurse called to complain that their system had been slow for the past 20 minutes.”

“We are a service company and bill by the hour so when the server isn’t working and people can’t do their job properly, we are losing money,” continued Valiulis. “An hour of downtime can cost us as much as \$25,000 in revenue.”

Valiulis attempted to limit downtime by increasing the number of staff charged with monitoring servers. At one point Valiulis had three IT administrators monitoring servers from key locations. Their role was to watch for server and network slow downs then go into the servers and kill processes until the issue was resolved.

As the frequency of these episodes increased, the cumulative expense of their problem was quickly getting out of hand. Valiulis decided it was time to find a more proactive solution.

Solution

“We first evaluated several monitoring and performance management products that were getting play from the press, but we were not satisfied with the results,” explained Valiulis. While researching Microsoft® TechNet and the Citrix® Forum, Valiulis learned about RTO Software. “Once I found out that other Citrix users were using RTO to solve some of their server problems, I decided we needed to give them a try.”

Valiulis found RTO TScale™ easy to deploy. Installation required just minutes for the 12 servers in their initial deployment.

“The thing that surprised me was that there were no reboots required for setup because RTO TScale is integrated into the Microsoft Windows Server console,” continued Valiulis. “Installation was instantaneous and RTO TScale started working.”

Next, Valiulis installed the RTO PinPoint™ Collector on a single server to help monitor other servers—in particular the Citrix Presentation Servers™ that had been locking up, plus the SQL servers where Hines needed to monitor utilization.



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Carl Valiulis
Director of Information Technology
Hines Associates

“RTO PinPoint and RTO TScale work together to give us exactly what we are looking for—monitoring our servers and applications all in a centralized, rolled-up application interface that alerts us to issues and allows us to drill-down for details when necessary.”

Carl Valiulis
Director of Information Technology
Hines Associates

Within a day of installation, RTO PinPoint identified Hines' anti-virus software as the culprit behind their lingering problem. It had been taking control of the servers—bouncing up and starting on these servers when it wasn't supposed to.

Hines immediately contacted their anti-virus company and learned there was a bug in their software that was taking control of the kernel and using 100% of the resources to fix viruses. Hines applied the available patch and hasn't experienced any hiccups in performance since.

Seeing Results

With RTO PinPoint and RTO TScale, Valiulis has been able to accomplish his goal of changing from a reactive to a proactive IT organization. “Basically we don't have surprises in the morning anymore.”

Now Hines has more control over their key applications. They use RTO TScale's application shaping capability to set thresholds and priority reduction to establish a sequence for knocking down applications.

“RTO PinPoint and RTO TScale work together to give us exactly what we were looking for,” explained Valiulis. “RTO PinPoint monitors our servers and reports what the servers and applications are doing and RTO TScale keeps the applications in line—all in a centralized, rolled-up application interface that allows us to drill-down for details when necessary.”

Before installing RTO, a Hines administrator was charged with going through and manually checking the parameters on each of their 35 servers every hour. The consolidated view provided by RTO PinPoint now saves this administrator up to three hours a day.

The two levels of alerts—serious and critical—are Valiulis' favorite part of the application.

“Having different level alerts helps because when key resources aren't available, we can put other IT folks on the critical alert distribution—without a lot of training—they are notified if there is a

significant problem with the system. Half the time they take care of it themselves,” said Valiulis.

The details included with the alerts are especially helpful to Hines. Each alert includes a one-hour snapshot of server activity to allow the administrator to see what the server was trying to do at the time of the problem. All of Hines' IT staff have remote access from their homes or mobile devices so when RTO PinPoint alerts them to problems, they are able to repair them as they occur.

“RTO products make us more productive by far—it has been very cost-effective and we are no longer in such a reactive mode,” explained Valiulis.

Future Plans

Now that Hines doesn't have to dedicate excessive headcount to monitoring servers, they have more resources to dedicate to new projects. They are already finding that their upgrade to Windows Server 2003 is easier with RTO.

“We've made RTO PinPoint a critical part of our migration plan. It is turned on immediately after we upgrade a server so that we can see how the server is performing as it goes into production,” said Derek Christopher, Network Administrator for Hines Associates. “Applications that were written for older operating systems may behave differently when we migrate them to Windows 2003, but with RTO PinPoint, we can gauge performance and identify problems before we move servers into production.”

Further, RTO is playing a critical role in helping Hines achieve one of their new, self-imposed IT objectives—a 99.999% uptime guarantee.

About RTO Software

RTO Software is a global provider of application-focused performance monitoring and optimization solutions for business-critical applications. RTO helps customers increase the business value of their IT organizations, maximize application investments and consistently deliver a superior user experience.



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