



WEB SERVICES MONITORING FROM TRIOMETRIC FORMS BACKBONE OF GTA TRAVELPORT WEB BUSINESS



CLIENT

GTA (Gullivers Travel Associates) is a world leader in the provision of ground travel products and services to the travel trade industry. It sources products from more than 30,000 suppliers in over 130 countries, and makes them available to a global audience in 29 languages.

SECTOR

Wholesale tour operations for ground travel arrangements, tourism and coach hire.

FUNCTION

Over half of the 21,000 bookings that GTA makes every day, are handled over the web in some form. The Company's sales channels include its own GTA branded website as well as several other 'white label' sites that are skinned with its clients' branding but are actually GTA's transactional backend.

In practice, a GTA client site sends an XML request to GTA's search engine which then executes a database search. GTA then, in turn responds for example, with up to 500 potential hotels; complete with pricing and availability.

VITAL STATISTICS

GTA's web infrastructure handles around 110 million hits a day; up from 50 million in 2005. Its XML interface alone services more than 2,500 clients which, combined with their 40+ websites which also consume the XML interface, results in more than 35 million hotel price and availability searches per day.

GTA also hosts an extranet for all of its suppliers to confirm bookings and, in the case of hotels, manipulate prices and allocated space.

UNDERSTANDING

GTA started working with Triometric in 2005; The current XML API had yet to take off and the Company had no visibility of who was hitting its web sites. It could not distinguish between customer enquiries and crawlers, and had no idea whether it was getting 100 hits per day, or 100,000.

Chris Anders, Director of IT Operations at GTA explains, "Back then, if our systems ran into any difficulties or suffered instability, we couldn't be sure why. We also had no concept of traffic volume or type that would enable us to plan and resource," he continues. "The business wanted to know the number of visitors using the extranet. Understanding how many were evoking sign-on in a five minute window for example, would allow us to capacity plan appropriately."

TESTING

A speculative meeting with Triometric soon resolved these issues, using its real-user testing and monitoring tool, Web Analyzer.

"The beauty of this particular product is that it has made no difference whatsoever to our infrastructure because it's totally non-intrusive and adds no network latency at all," continues Anders. "Alternative technologies and solutions usually involve processing information on the servers, whereas Web Analyzer's passive packet capture technology is completely transparent with no inline interference with customer requests."

GTA recently recruited two members of staff specifically to analyse the way customers were using the XML interface. Being able to understand clients' web sites has engendered a new way of collaborative working with them. Anders' team can now go to a client's web site as if they were a consumer, then return to its own systems to analyse how searches were performed. This has enabled them to rectify some important anomalies; allowing a greater surfacing of hotel inventory and leading to an increase in sales for both GTA and its client.



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Chris Anders, Director of IT Operations at GTA

MONITORING

It wasn't long after Analyzer going live that GTA realised that there was now also significant business intelligence (BI) that it didn't have before. It worked with Triometric to develop the XML Analysis module to capture and store that intelligence for business improvement. It was then used to analyse things like dates of travel; by understanding how far into the future web visitors are searching then helped GTA to define what its search cache should look like so that future searches can be faster.

GTA now has two large 40 inch screens dynamically displaying its performance dashboard. It enables Anders and his team to report in real-time on the volume of web traffic per minute, see the daily trends and spikes and also the 'look to book' ratios.

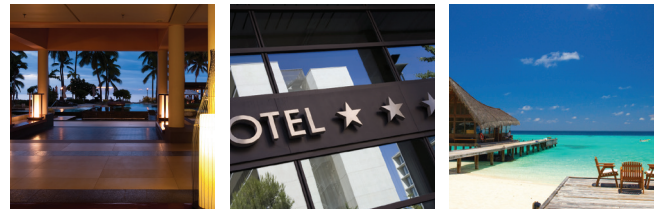
Using the Triometric dashboard, the team can easily see any spike in errors, and initiate an investigation. Uniquely, the system also allows access to the raw XML requests received; something that no-one else in the supply chain keeps a log of.

In addition to BI and service management, GTA uses its new monitoring capability to accelerate technical troubleshooting and to manage third party relationships. Anders explains, "We work with a lot of contract hotels through a negotiator network, and presenting a dynamic inventory without having to write XML API for each hotel's schema is a challenge. So, we use a third party integration with Pegasus to interface with the hotel chains," he continues. "This gives us access to bookings we couldn't otherwise offer and within more last minute time frames too. Analyzer allows us to monitor any web traffic travelling in or out, so we use its functionality to report on Pegasus response times."

"AVERAGE RESPONSE TIME TO CLIENTS IS 250 MILLISECONDS. AT ONE TIME, THIS WENT UP TO TWO SECONDS (8 TIMES SLOWER) BECAUSE OF A DOWNSTREAM HOTEL CHAIN TAKING TOO MUCH TIME TO RESPOND. THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO TRACK WITHOUT ANALYZER."

This type of response tracking is now used regularly as a proof of booking by the accounts team.

Web performance management will play a key role in GTA's future developments too. The Company has recently reviewed all of its processes and the technology that underpins them. When the core hotel reservation systems and automated process for accepting bookings are re-written, Analyzer will be used to benchmark their performance. As GTA re-develops away from green screen technology to become entirely web-based, the performance statistics will grow in importance.



Anders elaborates, "So many elements of our business are enhanced by Analyzer. We are now starting to outsource the hosting of our hotel images for example, and when the hosting companies wanted to know detail such as the average image size and number of hits they receive, we were easily able to define SLAs to support the new service," he adds. "Namely, how fast they downloaded from our in-house system, compared with the third party. And we can do it per country too."

In another instance, GTA detected what appeared to be a denial of service attack. Using Analyzer the Company was able to ascertain a set of circumstances that resulted in a traffic redirection loop explaining why website hits went up from 100 to 160 million per day. The problem was rapidly resolved; without Analyzer GTA claims it would have been completely blind.

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Chris Anders, Director of IT Operations at GTA

ROI

GTA measures its return on investment with Triometric on six levels:

- ▶ BI that has driven business improvement.
- ▶ Accurate and effective SLAs with third party suppliers.
- ▶ Performance enhancements that have shortened the sales window.
- ▶ Being able to 'future-proof' its systems.
- ▶ Improved customer satisfaction and retention.
- ▶ Significantly reduced mean time to problem resolution

A recent analysis of a new code release identified that a significant increase in the number of page objects would have a seriously detrimental effect on delivery performance to global clients. This analysis was done using Web Analyzer's historical request data and in-built GEO database identifying client locations.

It also highlighted the need for GTA to consider the browsers being used by its customer base. Different versions of Internet Explorer (IE) for example, ask for a different numbers of objects at a time. IE6 and IE7 request two at a time, IE8 asks for six and Firefox asks for 15 at a time.

"We didn't support IE6," says Anders. "The statistics from across our entire customer base show that very few still use it. Yet, for certain sites in certain locations we discovered that a massive 85 per cent of our customers were still using IE6 or 7. We could only know that through Analyzer, and that knowledge has led us to rethink our supported browsers and changed the way we develop now."

TESTIMONIAL

"Without Analyzer, our client and technical support teams wouldn't be able to do their jobs," adds Anders. "Now, there's not a single day goes by when we're not using the Triometric product. It seems that for every problem we have, Analyzer forms part of the solution!"

"The guys at Triometric are excellent," he concludes. "I can't speak highly enough of them in terms of service. I feel like they are working exclusively for me; which is great!"

