



CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY



Manufacturer Scales Operations and Boosts Service Levels with AlvakaNet

Alvaka tracks and manages Web services infrastructure with CA Unified Infrastructure Management.

BUSINESS

A sporting equipment manufacturer and its network of partners and customers rely extensively on its Web services. Executives want to see that the Web services infrastructure consistently meets the highest standards of performance and availability.

CHALLENGE

The manufacturer and its globally distributed network of employees, partners and customers rely extensively on the organization's web services infrastructure, but a prior vendor wasn't able to deliver the service levels required.

SOLUTION

For eleven years, the firm has entrusted the monitoring and management of its web services infrastructure to AlvakaNet.

BENEFIT

Through the AlvakaNet service, the manufacturer has been able to realize significant improvements in performance and availability, while at the same time efficiently managing costs and business growth.

Challenge

Maximizing the uptime of our Webservices infrastructure

"I can quickly drill down on anything they monitor in our environment and get detailed, up-to-the-minute information."

Systems Administrator

As a large enterprise with offices and manufacturing facilities on several continents, a sporting equipment manufacturer was highly reliant on its Web services. The organization's Web team is responsible for the global Web services infrastructure, which supports:

- Communications, transactions and workflows
- Services, such as Web content authoring, online commerce, marketing promotions and more
- Partners, retailers, employees and customers

Since the Web group's formation, the team has remained small. The staff quickly realized that, particularly as the infrastructure began to span more regions and continents, that they'd need the help of an outside service provider.

"Rather than hiring another full-time staff member, we wanted to bring in an experienced outside organization that could handle a 24/7 rotation," explained a system administrator on the Web team.

Early on in the group's formation, the Web team brought on a service provider, but they soon found that the vendor wasn't able to consistently support the manufacturer's up-time requirements. While the service provider's representatives could report on outages and performance anomalies, they weren't able to address issues without the involvement of the manufacturer's staff — and they weren't able to provide the timely insights that could help the team quickly address issues. Further, they weren't able to offer the predictive insights that could help staff prevent issues from occurring in the first place. Consequently, the Web team was forced to contend with consistent uptime challenges that were creating significant business issues:

- **IT staff members were stretched.** On a consistent basis, the lean Web team was busy fielding support calls and troubleshooting and repairing issues. Further, after working full business days, administrators were often forced to contend with afterhours interruptions because they had to respond to outages.
- **Customers and partners were experiencing downtime,** which could have a negative impact on revenues.
- **Employees were contending with lost productivity.** For example, given recurring system issues with the infrastructure that supported Web publishing, staff members were frequently unable to make updates in an efficient and timely manner.
- **Lack of systems availability made it difficult** to move forward with infrastructure standardization and optimization efforts.

"Like many other manufacturers, much of our business is conducted over the Web," the administrator stated. "While in the past, we would have taken orders over the telephone and via fax, now virtually all our sales go through a Web portal. Consequently, maximizing the uptime of our Web services infrastructure was a vital business imperative."

Solution

Comprehensive monitoring

Harnessing a Comprehensive Set of Services

The manufacturer relies on Alvaka for these services:

- After hours, tier-one support
- Monitoring of all Web services and associated infrastructure
- Dashboards
- Reports and analytics
- Infrastructure development and maintenance

"They continue to exceed my expectations in terms of the levels of service they provide and their speed in getting things done."

Systems Administrator

More than eleven years ago, the manufacturer's executive team chose Alvaka as its service provider partner, establishing a long-term business relationship that has evolved and thrived ever since.

Over the course of its 32 years in business, Alvaka has established a strong track record of building deep partnerships with its clients. For the manufacturer, Alvaka has proven to be a genuine solution provider, delivering expertise, technology and services that have helped organization address its key technical and business challenges.

"Alvaka is a critical part of our team, and they serve many different roles in our organization," the administrator explained. "On a day-to-day basis, they function as our eyes and ears, managing monitoring and alerting for us. After hours, they can remediate problems that may arise, so we can go on with our personal lives. They've also grown to help us administer security, manage the network, and plan future build outs of our infrastructure. We can go to them with any kind of questions and requests, whether around day-to-day operations, acquisition and planning, or new technologies, and they are always able to help."

"Within Alvaka, there are people I've been working with all along that I have complete confidence in," the administrator continued. "Since I started working with them more than eleven years ago, they continue to exceed my expectations in terms of the levels of service they provide and their speed in getting things done."

Today, Alvaka delivers services on a global scale, supporting the manufacturer's operations on five continents. Alvaka delivers a comprehensive range of differentiated services, which are detailed in the following sections.

The manufacturer relies on AlvakaNet, a service that provides advanced monitoring and proactive network management on an around-the-clock basis, 365 days a year. AlvakaNet is powered by CA Unified Infrastructure Management, an IT monitoring platform that provides scalable, easy-to-use and resilient monitoring capabilities.

AlvakaNet provides comprehensive coverage of the manufacturer's servers, including Web servers, authoring servers and business-to-business communications servers. In total, AlvakaNet monitors 39 servers, tracking 186 performance metrics on each, including such aspects as uptime, utilization, load, capacity, thresholds, response time and much more.

To help maximize the performance and availability of the company's Web services, AlvakaNet harnesses the comprehensive coverage of CA Unified Infrastructure Management, tracking a range of systems and services, including:

- CPU, disk and memory of servers
- Cisco networking equipment
- DNS servers
- End user and application response through end-to-end synthetic application transaction monitoring
- Microsoft Exchange Server
- Web application servers and Java applications
- Logs
- Linux and Windows OS
- SQL databases
- Web pages
- VMware virtualized servers and environments.

By leveraging this extensive coverage, Alvaka staff can intelligently track performance across the entire infrastructure, and gain the top-to-bottom visibility needed to keep services running optimally.

Responsive support and proactive remediation

Alvaka staff provides the manufacturer with after-hours support, handling tier-one support for all alerts, calls and emails that come in outside of the regular business hours of the organization's IT staff. As a result, staff members don't have to contend with these interruptions during non-business hours.

Over the years, Alvaka staff has come to serve as virtual team members who can fill any gaps needed. On an ongoing basis, Alvaka administrators field user requests and alerts that then trigger Alvaka's dynamic support and management action plans, processes that have been proven to help quickly resolve issues and prevent outages.

"I'm handling 37 technologies in this group, and without effective backup, it's sometimes problematic simply for me to go out to lunch," the administrator revealed. "Alvaka's team has proven that they can fill gaps if needed. On an ongoing basis, they're able to pitch in and seamlessly take an effort over. For example, if I don't have time to manage a system recovery, handle troubleshooting, or install a patch, they can quickly step in to help."

"A few months ago, I was hit with an unexpected medical issue that kept me out of work for a week. The Alvaka team immediately stepped in, going on heightened alert to make sure everything ran smoothly in my absence, and letting staff within our organization know who to contact at Alvaka if an issue should arise. They were indispensable in keeping things moving smoothly while I was out. It's great to have that kind of backup when we need it."

Extensive reporting and expert analysis deliver true insights

Through the AlvakaNet service, executives and staff within the client organization can get the visibility they need. AlvakaNet delivers:

- **Extensive data collection.** Across its client base, Alvaka now captures approximately 200 million alarms a month. Further, Alvaka offers customers a 12-month floating data archive, which is uncommon in the industry.
- **Expertise in leveraging data.** A true partner to the manufacturer, Alvaka does much more than forward raw monitoring data. Over the years, Alvaka staff has gained the expertise and capabilities it needs to leverage these vast volumes of data so it obtains the proactive insights needed for optimizing performance and resource utilization. Alvaka staff understands what metrics need to be tracked, and how to best interpret the information being captured. Based on its team's extensive experience, Alvaka has refined its staff, processes and tools. For example, Alvaka has developed and refined a proprietary data analysis engine and custom reporting tools.
- **Sophisticated reporting, dashboards and analytics.** Alvaka provides clients with sophisticated reporting and dashboard services, helping ensure that customers can leverage the vast amounts of data being captured. Further, this reporting provides actionable service and monitoring data that details the cause of outages and offers insights for proactive planning in order to optimize budgets and resource allocations.

"The management portal Alvaka provides is fantastic. Now, I can log into the portal and submit pretty much any query I have."

Systems Administrator

With this expertise, the Alvaka team can perform analysis and glean the insights needed to make proactive recommendations and ongoing improvements. On a routine basis, Alvaka engineers review monitoring data with the client's Web team to help identify issues, determine opportunities for optimization and discover new potential problem areas.

"The management portal Alvaka provides is fantastic, another example of how they've gone above and beyond my expectations," the administrator explained. "All the time and development work they put in, and their willingness to collect vast amounts of data have been invaluable. Now, I can log into the portal and submit pretty much any query I have. I can quickly drill down on anything they monitor in our environment and get detailed, up-to-the-minute information on resources, such as CPU utilization, hard disk space, open ports, connections and more."

Through these capabilities and services, AlvakaNet equips the manufacturer with a range of advantages:

- **Objective performance measurement.** What is slow network performance? What should page load times be? Without concrete measurements, these kinds of questions can be debated and open to interpretation. One of AlvakaNet's key differentiators is that it delivers objective quantification of performance. AlvakaNet helps establish meaningful measurements and tracks improvements or regressions.
- **Informed infrastructure changes and investments.** AlvakaNet provides detailed metrics that can help the manufacturer justify and validate infrastructure changes and investments. Alvaka helps support infrastructure purchase requests, giving management clear visibility into the need for additional capacity. For example, by demonstrating how a current host is almost at maximum capacity, Alvaka can help make a clear business case for buying a new VM host to support a new service.
- **Insights for fast response and proactive management.** When outages and performance issues arise, administrators need to quickly determine what the cause is, for example, whether it's an issue with a server, switch, firewall or some other system. By providing detailed metrics and sophisticated reporting, AlvakaNet can uncover the cause of problems and discover ways to detect and pre-empt issues. For example, after implementing Java monitoring, Alvaka staff found that trends indicated the occurrence of repeated spikes in memory utilization. The Alvaka staff was then able to predict those spikes and allocate the additional resources required to avoid downtime. On another occasion, Alvaka administrators spotted anomalies in network availability. While these anomalies were sporadic and momentary, the team's analysis helped them spot an underlying problem associated with a load balancer, which was causing the issues.
- **Extensive dashboards offer transparency.** Alvaka is committed to providing transparency to customers. One way Alvaka does this is by providing on-demand dashboards, which give the manufacturer's administrators and executives extensive views into the service levels being delivered at any given time. These dashboards are available to customers through the My Alvaka site. The manufacturer's staff can login and access monitoring data and thresholds at any time, and export it for further analysis. Alvaka staff has helped develop custom dashboards as well. For example, working with the manufacturer's development team, Alvaka staff started delivering custom dashboards for coding projects, so developers could view in real time how their code changes were affecting performance.

Technical expertise and assistance with infrastructure development and maintenance

Alvaka has helped the manufacturer by managing several infrastructure areas. The organization counts on Alvaka to manage the full global Web services infrastructure, including network, servers and storage. In addition, the manufacturer relies on Alvaka staff to support their VPN, which represents a critical means for the globally distributed organization to communicate and operate.

"Over the years, they have brought the services, expertise and assistance we needed to manage our infrastructure build out, and ultimately create a solid environment," the administrator said. "In my role, I've had to take on responsibility for dozens of new technologies that I didn't have prior experience with. Having the experts at Alvaka available to answer my questions and provide best practice guidance has been of great value."

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Systems Administrator

A true partnership for supporting key initiatives

Over the past several years, Alvaka has supported a range of key initiatives for the manufacturer. Alvaka staff members have established close, long-term relationships with many individuals across several departments within the client organization. Often, Alvaka representatives will be apprised of upcoming initiatives. They'll then work with the manufacturer's staff to understand the criticality and requirements of new services, and then manage the implementation and administration of the infrastructure and capacity that's needed.

"When new initiatives came up, they've been able to provide us with a range of options," the administrator stated. "For example, on one hand, they could simply make recommendations, or they could go from making the recommendation to managing the implementation, and then training us to take over the technology. Either way, since they get involved from the very beginning, they're able to give us the help we need, and after implementation, step in seamlessly to start monitoring."

Following are a few of the areas in which Alvaka has helped:

- **Development and testing support.** In addition to the Web infrastructure team, Alvaka staff has established a strong relationship with the development team. Rather than just coming in to support the infrastructure after an application is developed and deployed, Alvaka's staff gets involved early on to help support Web application development, testing and planned changes. This early involvement cultivates a strategic, collaborative relationship. Rather than just tactical monitoring, Alvaka is involved at a strategic level and can help optimize performance and service levels of new applications. By implementing managed services at the pre-production stage and then migrating those services along with the application as it's moved into production, Alvaka can help alleviate many issues that would otherwise arise during initial rollout. In addition, they can capture initial baseline metrics that are critical in enabling the objective tracking of changes in performance over time.

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Systems Administrator

- **New service support.** The development team was looking to roll out an important new service on an ambitious schedule. Alvaka was able to leverage its familiarity with the manufacturer's infrastructure in order to find available resources that could be allocated to support the new service. As a result, the Alvaka team helped provide the required capabilities in time to support the planned go-live date, and it did so without requiring the organization to make new investments.
- **Domain name service (DNS) support.** In prior years, the Web team had been leveraging an external DNS service. After a merger, the Web team experienced a huge increase in the site traffic that it needed to support. Given this massive increase in traffic, the organization's decision makers found that the DNS service was becoming increasingly expensive, and was failing to deliver the return on investment required. Alvaka helped the Web team develop an internal DNS system, facilitating the set up of a redundant, highly available server environment internally. As a result, after paying this one-time expense for setting up the internal service, the manufacturer was able to stop paying the high recurring costs of the external DNS service, which yielded significant savings on an ongoing basis.

As the administrator outlined, these types of engagements will continue moving forward: "We have several key initiatives planned for the upcoming year, including upgrading our SAN, setting up a business continuity fail-back site, and upgrading and expanding our virtualization deployments—and Alvaka will be integral to making this all happen."

By partnering with Alvaka, the manufacturer has been able to realize a range of significant benefits.

Benefit

Improved service levels and peace of mind

Within weeks of Alvaka's first engagement, the manufacturer was able to realize significant improvements in the service levels that the Web services infrastructure was delivering.

"When it comes to system availability, things changed dramatically during the first year Alvaka started working with us," the administrator explained. "Before Alvaka came on board, our Web service availability was in the 30-40% range, and often we'd have several significant outages a week. The Alvaka team was quickly able to straighten everything out. That's where they really excelled. They didn't just fix problems from being more responsive, they actually fixed problems by stepping in and suggesting ways we could do things better."

"Now, our Web services are in the 98 or 99% availability range, and we have metrics like that across most of the technologies they've helped with. They are very careful about making sure that everything is done in a redundant fashion and that we have effective backup mechanisms. First and foremost though, they try to make sure systems doesn't fail in the first place, so we don't have to worry about whatever backup strategy we have in place. They make my job a lot easier, and now I can actually sleep at night. I don't have to worry about things failing apart after I leave the office. In fact, I don't even think about those things any more, they're just so out of sight, out of mind for us."

"Before Alvaka came on board, our Web service availability was in the 30-40% range. Now, our Web services are in the 98 or 99% availability range."

Systems Administrator

Conclusion

A Partnership that Fuels Lasting Success

Lean operations, cost efficiency and scalability

Over the past eleven years, the manufacturer's business has grown substantially, both organically and through acquisitions, and Alvaka has been instrumental in delivering the infrastructure required to support this scale. For example, after an acquisition, the manufacturer experienced a huge increase in Web traffic, and Alvaka helped the company scale its infrastructure efficiently in order to support this increased resource demand.

By working with Alvaka for managed services, the manufacturer is able thrive amidst this growth while having just one full-time staff member tasked with managing the manufacturer's online infrastructure and service levels. Recently, an executive researched the relative costs of working with Alvaka and of working with a large system integrator and cloud service provider. The executive found that the system integrator and cloud service provider would have been twice as expensive as working with Alvaka. Further, Alvaka has been instrumental in supporting a range of cost saving initiatives, such as the move to an internal DNS deployment outlined earlier, and leveraging resources and investments efficiently.

"They helped us implement optimal technologies and software, enabling us to minimize the cost and effort required to build this organization," the administrator said. "Sometimes we could actually see that by implementing one of their suggestions it would cut into their profits because it meant they'd spend less time on doing certain things, but that's one of the things that continued to solidify our relationship and deepen our level of trust."

Ultimately, the partnership the manufacturer has forged with Alvaka has proven to yield significant and lasting dividends, benefits that extend past technology and translate to the bottom line.

"We're a very dynamic company," the administrator revealed. "We don't have a lot of time to waste on technologies or vendors that aren't working for us. Certainly, if the team at Alvaka hadn't continued to meet and exceed our expectations, we would have stopped working with them long ago."

The administrator continued: "The team members at Alvaka are clearly expert at technology, but what really differentiates them is their willingness to go above and beyond and do whatever they can to meet and exceed our expectations. While it would be easy to find another service provider with technical expertise, it would be hard to find another partner with their commitment. They were there to address our initial challenges, and they've continued to deliver the services and service levels our business needs ever since. They've been a big part of our business' successes. They have a deep understanding of our organization and technology, and it would be hard, if not impossible, to replace them."



"Alvaka" is a traditional Icelandic word meaning "ever vigilant" and describes our commitment to always be on the job. We have invested nearly thirty years, and millions of dollars, perfecting the way networks are managed and secured. Since 1982, Alvaka has been a leading edge innovator for the technology services industry. We have dedicated our resources and people to delivering superior value, and qualified professional advice. We provide unparalleled network design, implementation and support services. Our award winning, proactive Managed Services are the best in the business.



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