



optionsXpress

Online Brokerage Exercises Valuable Option: Using BMC Application Problem Resolution to Solve Problems More Quickly

Geography

North America

Industry

Financial Services

Business Need

optionsXpress needed to provide a virtually trouble-free online experience, despite an extremely complex, high-traffic environment.

Solution

The brokerage chose BMC Application Problem Resolution to capture full forensic views of real-time production problems that would be too expensive and time consuming to solve with conventional problem replication methodology.

Results

- > Transformed performance of new Web site release from hourly restarts to uninterrupted operation
- > Improved IT team efficiency and reduced root cause analysis time; went "from knowing that something happened, to knowing why something happened"
- > Eliminated finger-pointing with third-party vendors
- > Enabled customer experience quality that has earned top industry honors

optionsXpress needed to provide its customers with an optimal user experience, without interruptions or delays. The company turned to BMC Application Problem Resolution to capture real-time problem behavior, enabling optionsXpress to provide the Web's most consistently reliable trading site.

Three things about the leading online brokerage, optionsXpress, cannot be overstated: the challenge inherent in its IT environment; the high expectations of its customer base; and the industry recognition that optionsXpress is winning for brilliantly rising to both. The optionsXpress Web-based trading application combines third-party streaming quotes with extensive, internally-developed analytical and trading programs. Together, these provide a huge range of information and trading possibilities, including price improvements, trailing stops, conditional orders, and "one triggers another" or "one triggers two more" orders.

KEEPING COMPLEXITY FROM CAUSING CONCERN

Such attractions, along with outstanding ease of use, helped optionsXpress nearly triple its daily order volume and customer base between 2003 and 2004. Traders swarm online some 5,000-7,000 at a time, consuming 80,000 messages per second while maintaining 20, 30, even 40 watch lists per account. With all this activity — supported by a Web site that undergoes monthly real-time upgrades — the opportunities for problems are incalculable.

Yet despite behind-the-scenes complexity, optionsXpress customers expect a seamless, ceaseless, friction-free user experience. Interruptions and delays are intolerable. Traders tend to feel that any moment when the system thwarts them may be the moment that obliterates great opportunity. True or not, it's certainly the moment that obliterates goodwill. To minimize such moments and safeguard customer satisfaction, as well as improve IT team productivity, optionsXpress uses the BMC Application Problem Resolution.

QUICKLY REVEALING ROOT CAUSES

"BMC Application Problem Resolution is the only application problem resolution system that captures real-time problem behavior," notes optionsXpress president, David Kalt. "For optionsXpress, this unique advantage gives us huge time savings while helping us realize our goal of providing the Web's most consistently reliable trading site."

Vlad Karpel, optionsXpress executive vice president of IT, cites a case in point: "Last month, we had a technical issue with one of our applications that made certain trades impossible. We activated the BMC Application Problem Resolution Black Box, and in short order, discovered the problem. Without BMC Application Problem Resolution, we might have had to essentially re-create the entire application, examining every line, adding tracing statements, and re-compiling. With BMC Application Problem Resolution, we capture root causes in the course of production."

Analogous to a black box flight recorder on an aircraft, the patented BMC Application Problem Resolution Black Box software technology captures a synchronized, real-time log of user actions, system events, performance metrics, configuration data, and code execution flow when a problem occurs.

By recording the actual application execution, BMC Application Problem Resolution eliminates the need to document and reproduce issues before resolving them, thereby providing a significant efficiency gain for development, testing, and support teams.

SMOOTHING OUT REAL-TIME ROLLOUTS

OptionsXpress updates and upgrades its Web site every month, implementing improvements, adding new features, and improving the interface — all while meeting the real-time demands of its quick-fingered customers. Even with the most careful software development, BMC Application Problem Resolution plays an indispensable role in smoothing these cycles. The key to the system's time-saving power is that it virtually eliminates the need to replicate problems offline in order to diagnose and resolve them.

"During a particularly challenging rollout, we might initially have to restart every hour, on average," says Karpel. "But by capturing everything with the BMC Application Problem Resolution Black Box, we progress to steady-state operation far sooner than otherwise possible."

UNRUFLING THIRD-PARTY FEATHERS

optionsXpress employs a mix of third-party applications, in addition to its own homegrown software. Recognizing the potential cost savings, optionsXpress supports these applications with BMC Application Problem Resolution. By doing so, optionsXpress has eliminated the aggravating finger-pointing that inevitably occurs when the source of a problem is ambiguous. Now, with sources and causes clear-cut, this misplaced energy can be focused on solving the problems and moving forward.

In any environment as complex as optionsXpress.com, no one thing is all-important to the user experience. "Different customers have different favorite features," Kalt observes. "Some people love our charts, other people love our trailing orders, but everybody loves a Web site that simply works."

And optionsXpress.com does work. With BMC Application Problem Resolution contributing to its dependability and performance, the optionsXpress Web site has garnered the industry's highest honors, including Barron's first-ever 4-star rating, its "Best Online Broker" award two years running, recognition from Smart Money as "Best Discount Broker", and a Forbes nod as a "Best of Web Favorite Site."

"Every new feature we add to optionsXpress, and every award we win, encourages us to go further, aim higher, and innovate that much more on behalf of the traders we serve," says Kalt. "And the more power, capability, and sophistication we build into optionsXpress, the more indispensable BMC Application Problem Resolution becomes to us."

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— David Kalt
President
optionsXpress

Key Products Used:

> BMC Application Problem Resolution

About optionsXpress

optionsXpress, Inc. is an innovative retail online brokerage specializing in options and futures. Barron's named optionsXpress the number one online broker for four years in a row (2003 to 2006) and Kiplinger's Personal Finance named it the top discount broker in 2006. Learn more at www.optionsXpress.com.

About BMC Software

BMC Software delivers the solutions IT needs to increase business value through better management of technology and IT processes. Our industry-leading Business Service Management solutions help you reduce cost, lower risk of business disruption, and benefit from an IT infrastructure built to support business growth and flexibility. Only BMC provides best practice IT processes, automated technology management, and award-winning BMC Atrium technologies that offer a shared view into how IT services support business priorities. Known for enterprise solutions that span mainframe, distributed systems, and end-user devices, BMC also delivers solutions that address the unique challenges of the mid-sized business. Founded in 1980, BMC has offices worldwide and fiscal 2007 revenues of \$1.58 billion. Activate your business with the power of IT. www.bmc.com.



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