INTERVIEW WITH SCOTT SOBERS

Eric Green: Hello and welcome to a new podcast series from IBM software that explores the challenges IT managers and business professionals are facing today. I'm Eric Green and I'll be talking with a range of experts to discover new perspectives, approaches and examples that can help meet these challenges and introduce you to the capabilities of smarter software from IBM. So let's get started.

Welcome back to the show. So today we're going to be talking about network and service assurance. Everything from monitoring to automation to how our networks behave sort of in the modern day is the discussion today, and here to discuss this with us is Scott Sobers, who is Marketing and Program Director within IBM Tivoli. Thanks so much for joining us today, Scott.

Scott Sobers: Thank you.

Eric Green: So if I may start, what is it that's actually driving demand for network and service assurance today?

Scott Sobers: Well, there are a number of things that are happening across the globe, a lot of large macro-level forces that are really, you know, pushing industries to evolve. I'm sure that most people are familiar with IBM's conversation that they started a few years ago around the smarter planet where everything is becoming instrumented, interconnected and more intelligent. And I think everyone sees it in their, you know, in their personal lives and also in their business environments that you're seeing new devices enter the market: smart phones, iPads and so forth. Things within your home are becoming more and more intelligent, refrigerators, microwaves, you know entertainment systems.

But also in the business world, you're finding that everything is getting pushed to not only the internet but you're also starting to connect new types of devices to services and you know, you're starting to see new developments within the industry where companies like Telnor in the Nordic region are working with transportation companies to deliver smarter transportation services. Or in the United States, Aircell is helping to put WiFi on airplanes so that as you know, a passenger, you can get access to your e-mail and to the internet from San Francisco to New York. So there are a lot of forces that are driving this. I mean the top ones I was saying just, you know, the need to deliver new services, the

continued need to reduce operational expenditures, and lastly is the, you know, the need to ensure the quality of services.

Eric Green: And within that, I mean, would part of it not be the always connected nature of our society today? I mean you mentioned smart devices and it's kind of the always on mentality, right? If you can't have immediate satisfaction for whatever you need then you're going to move onto something else.

Scott Sobers: I think always on is a critical component of it, but it's not just, you know, always on your traditional sense to your smart phone or your laptop. But what you're finding out is that there are so many new types of devices that are literally getting connected to the internet and to business services. So I think everyone's familiar with the iPad. If you look at, you know, mobile gaming systems. The next generation of home appliances, whether it's a refrigerator or a microwave are becoming connected. And not too distant in the future, everyone's home will have some sort of smart meter attached to it which will allow you to not only view your energy usage levels but also control energy usage. So, you know, the ways which we used to interact with services and devices is completely changing.

Eric Green: And you know it kind of sounds a lot like asset management, but I mean it obviously differs from it. Can you sort of give our audience sort of where the differentiator is?

Scott Sobers: Yeah sure it's fairly simple. Asset management looks at, you know, where would an asset reside in your inventory whether it's, you know, physical inventory that's in the back of a truck, or whether it's in a building or a particular location, and helps you to track the life cycle of that asset. What network and service assurance does is a bit different. It relies heavily on asset management and inventory systems but network and service assurance is akin to would be the dashboard in your car. So it gives you indicators about the availability of your car, the performance of your car, and if something is broken, it will raise a dashboard light. So for example, performance management looks at the amount of capacity in your network, which is similar to the tachometer in your car which tells you how many RPMs you have left before you have before you redline the engine. It tells you how fast the car is going and if you were to have a light bulb out or, you know, low on oil, those indicators come up. And you can imagine as these networks and these services become even more interconnected, they also become much more complex. So it

becomes even more complicated to be able to pinpoint a particular issue in a network or a service because you're trying to figure out maybe amongst – you know, hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of you know, servers, switches and routers, applications, where is that particular problem?

Eric Green: Very interesting stuff. So what exactly is changing in network and service assurance? I mean innovation is obviously a key successful, a key component of this. But what is it that you see as changing over time?

Scott Sobers: I think the major shifts that you're seeing now is that most organizations are migrating from merely managing the network, particular application or a server to managing the service, the service quality and the customer experience. And what you'll find in many organizations is that the IT and the network operations and even to a certain extent the life business teams tend to be slightly disconnected. What we see happening is that network and service assurance is helping them provide a single consistent view of a service, of the customer experience, of the service quality, across these different teams and helping to knock down, you know, the physical silos but also political silos that exist within an organization.

So in a telecommunication company, for example, most of your applications traditionally resided on the IT side of the house and network operations has its own operating systems and management processes. Network and service assurance can help to not only manage the network side of the business but also applications that are running over the network and then take that view and roll up a level so that, you know, a business level user can have a view into which services are up, which ones would be having issues, and if there is an issue, you know, which of their, you know, customers are being impacted and how they're being impacted.

Eric Green: And how would you implement capabilities like say visibility control and automation, which I know come up over and over again when we talk about network and service assurance.

Scott Sobers: So visibility, control and automation are critical to our customers and our partners. Those are three of the key tenets that they're trying to achieve with integrated service management and particularly with network and service assurance. With visibility, as I mentioned earlier, customers are trying to get visibility in not only their underlying services but their infrastructure and into the

quality of the services. For example, if a banking service were to go down, you know, who is impacted for how long, where is the root cause of the issue and so forth. With control, what we find for example is that in many networks, a lot of the issues that are caused are actually still human errors. I think it's up to about two-thirds of network issues are caused by misconfigurations. And with control, for example, you can look at who has access to a particular device or to a server. Who made a change or modification to it last, and if that change or modification were to disrupt a network or service, you'd be able to, you know, quickly or automatically turn it back. And then obviously with automation, a critical part of, you know, network and service assurance is the ability to go ahead and apply automation rules and methodologies, you know, to business practices, to processes like ITIL or to telecom processes like ETOM, to be able to help to streamline operations.

Eric Green: So up until this point, most enterprises only really monitored network's apps or even a service. Earlier, you and I were talking about the customer experience and how that's really been left out. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Scott Sobers: Yeah, this is really the next frontier for enterprises and communications service providers. The objective for them is to get beyond managing in silos, so managing an application is a silo, a server is a silo or a network is a silo. But to be able to not only monitor the actual service itself but to be able to monitor and measure the quality to an individual user such as yourself or myself, we could look at the quality of the conversation on this call, we could look at the quality of video down to a handset, we could look at the quality of video that are being delivered to a subscriber in a home. Or it could be the quality of a service delivered to the enterprise. So this technology exists now and it's still, you know, in the early adoption phase, but this is really the next generation of management whereby enterprises and telecommunication companies will be able to, you know, add a whole new layer of visibility into not only their services but into their actual customer bases.

Eric Green: And talking about visualization, listeners definitely benefit from things like, you know, earlier you were talking about the example of a dashboard in a car. Are there other type of examples that you might able to use to sort of really show what network and service level management, you know, means for our listeners?

Scott Sobers: I think the dashboard is probably the easiest example for everyone to understand. I wish I could put a picture in front of everyone on the call right now of what the dashboard would look like but usually it's dials like what you have on your dashboard, it's you know, red, yellow and green lights. It's trending charts. It really depends upon the view. The views can be customized by the type of user and the organization. We find that some organizations want to have a lot of dashboards and a lot of metrics and charts on their dashboards. Others look at it like, you know, a new airliner. They only want to know when there's a particular issue, right? They only want to have a red light pop up when something's going wrong. They don't want to, you know, know when everything's working correctly.

Eric Green: Excellent, so from that perspective, maybe you can sort of quickly paint the picture of how IBM is approaching this.

Scott Sobers: Sure, IBM continues to innovate in this space. We continue to deliver new products, new services, new features and functions to not only help to measure the availability, the performance and the quality across the network but with integrated service management, like we talked about earlier, you know, we're helping to provide the visibility, control and automation across your services. Whether it's looking at your individual storage requirements, you know, the security requirements for a particular service. You know with enterprise asset management we're able to look at, you know, where a particular component may reside and help to manage the life cycle. And with analytics, we bring a whole new level of visibility into integrated service management by helping to look at the trending and determine, you know, when and where a service-affecting issue may occur before it actually does occur.

Eric Green: Scott, I'd like to thank you so much for joining us today. That's actually all the time we have for today's podcast, but thanks so much for joining us.

Scott Sobers: Thank you so much.

Eric Green: Thanks for listening. Please do visit IBM.com/software to connect with our experts, continue the conversation, and to learn more about smarter software from IBM. Let's build a smarter planet.