

VMware Service Manager - Web-based service management solution underpins Navigant's move to a centralized IT support structure



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– Mitch Fillmore, Head of Central IT Operations division, Navigant

Navigant International

About Navigant International

Navigant International Inc. is the second largest provider of corporate travel management services in North America.

From its headquarters in Denver Colorado, Navigant organizes the travel arrangements of some 13,000 clients across the US and internationally, including bookings for flights, hotels, rental cars and convention planning - all the services of a normal travel agency, but on a very large corporate scale. Navigant's clients range across industries as diverse as government, leisure and military.

Navigant has experienced a phenomenal rate of growth in recent years due to its rapid acquisition of travel agencies - over 40 since 1997.

Positioning IT services to support rapid growth

Navigant's network of travel agents extends to over 1,300 locations in the US, Canada, Brazil and Europe. Agents work both at the company's own sites, and onsite at client organizations.

Navigant's Central IT Operations division, headed up by Mitch Fillmore, manages the huge IT infrastructure that supports those agents, comprising some 4,300 PCs alone. A failure in any part of the network can have a direct effect on revenue by preventing agents from making travel reservations, which in turn impacts the company's service reputation.

For Navigant's larger sites, a problem can potentially mean hundreds of agents unable to take calls. For a company that turns over \$4 billion in air tickets per year, that adds up to thousands of dollars per minute.

With the rate of acquisition set to continue, the IT division wanted to reposition its service and support so that it could continue to resolve IT problems as efficiently as possible as the company grew. It also needed to smoothly manage the processes involved in getting newly acquired agencies up and running on Navigant's network.

Navigant made the strategic decision to centralize the management of all IT services and support at corporate headquarters in Denver. The alternative - deploying an ever-increasing taskforce of technicians, with the associated costs and inefficiencies - was not a viable one.

According to Mitch Fillmore, "We have worked very hard over the past years to position headquarters as the first line of support. Instead of having our field IT staff deal with password resets, they can spend time on more important issues and problems. In addition, HQ is staffed with 1st, 2nd, and 3rd tier support so we want to start troubleshooting an issue and deal with it when it happens."

"If we can resolve the issue at the Help Desk, then we've taken care of that person a lot quicker than potentially having to dispatch a regional IT staff member that may be hours away from their office," he says.

Selecting a solution to support Navigant's business model

Navigant performed an extensive review of the market before selecting VMware Service Manager web-based service management solution to support its centralized business model. The VMware solution additionally provided the comprehensive feature set that Navigant would need as it grew.

Fillmore explains that "As we've grown and unified the IT infrastructure across all our different regions of the world, we needed to ensure that our help desk and service system could scale up to our level."

"With our drive to go global and have a single point of data - a kind of data warehouse of all of our problems and issues - we pushed to go forward with a universal system that could be reached out of headquarters."

Central control, Global access

VMware Service Manager has been implemented by Navigant as a baseline application to manage all IT incidents and problems across its network. The system, installed centrally at Navigant headquarters, is accessible across the Web from every PC, at every Navigant site.

"A lot of our staff are dispersed around the globe, connecting via Web browser at their desk," says Fillmore. "We needed a solution that allowed our people, wherever they are working on an issue, to connect up to that ticket, get the details, solve the issue and annotate and close the ticket."

Navigant staff connect to the VMware system via dialup or wireless connection, using PCs and laptops. The company is also looking at using Tablet PCs (a cross between a PC and notepad), so that technical field staff can be roaming around and have full connection to the system to close tickets and troubleshoot problems.

Extending the system as Navigant's business grows

Navigant's future plans include extending VMware Service Manager to manage other Service Management processes, supported by an online Knowledge Bank.

"With our explosive growth we have developed a need for Configuration Management and Change Management," says Fillmore. "At the onset, one of the attractions of VMware Service Manager was that we could build up the system in a modular approach. There's definitely an appeal to being able to add on features and modules that will grow along with us as our business and needs grow."

Navigant is also at the early stages of implementing ITIL - the IT Infrastructure Library best practice standard for Service Management. "From an overall IT policy and practices perspective, ITIL is at the forefront and we're gradually training up our staff to deploy, develop and support applications and hardware based on those practices. That's a priority as we grow this group."

The advantage of web-based technology

VMware Service Manager web-based architecture was integral to its ability to support Navigant's centralized IT model.

"Our ethos is to utilize our staff as efficiently as possible, and deploy our applications quickly and painlessly," says Fillmore. "Any application that does not allow for a web-based installation, or very automated client installation, we take a hard look at to see if there is a better option out there. We don't want to have to continue to support old technology."

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An additional consideration for Navigant was that any system they chose should be able to run across the existing infrastructure. "We needed a solution that was lightweight over the WAN. We couldn't have implemented a client server system as widely as we've implemented VMware Service Manager's web system, because we do have some slow WAN links between our various sites out there."

"We have found that folks can still have a very good experience using the full web application. It works really well over pretty much any connection."

Return on Investment

"The biggest return on investment from implementing the VMware system is having everyone on a single platform, having a centralized database of all issues," according to Fillmore. "Being able to send a ticket to Europe when a call comes in to Denver, or dispatch someone very effectively in Canada or Chicago or wherever we need them."

"It has become part of our culture that if you have a problem, you make sure you have an VMware ticket number. That way you know if someone is looking at the issue and taking care of it. That's something that didn't exist for us until fairly recently. It was all recorded on paper."

"From our central headquarters we now have visibility of everything that's happening in Navigant IT support across the world."

