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Optimizing IT Management at Midsize Organizations: A Unified Platform Approach

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Introduction

Digital business applications are the lifeblood of commerce today. These applications support crucial functions such as online availability, competitiveness, organizational efficiency, and agility. IT organizations at midsize companies must provide employees and customers with digital services that are consistently available, reliable, efficient, and highly performant.

However, delivering on this is often challenging for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs). Most small and medium-sized businesses have few or no full-time IT employees. Forty-one percent of small and medium-sized businesses in IDC's *2022 Worldwide SMB Survey* of nearly 2,600 global small and medium-sized business leaders do not have any full-time IT employees in-house. And of those that do have full-time IT workers, 71% only employ from two to four workers.

Adding to these already tough conditions is the rapid shift to remote work and the additional security and connectivity demands this puts on already small IT staff.

In the IDC SMB survey, 59% of small and midsize companies listed mobile worker support, including remote access to network-based resources and cloud applications, as an employee experience and productivity technology priority over the next 12 months. In addition, 27% listed enabling remote workers to securely connect to business systems as a top challenge to achieving their business priorities.

All these factors make maintaining secure and high-functioning digital business applications challenging for SMBs today. However, this goal can be obtained with effective and robust remote monitoring and management solutions. Effectiveness is strengthened by solutions that take an integrated approach to simplify diverse IT management functions.

THIS WHITE PAPER:

Examines the role of IT management solutions in supporting and optimizing IT and business operations at midsize organizations.

Identifies key IT operational pain points and suggests approaches for management strategies.

Discusses the advantages of integrated management platforms over using several point tools from different providers.

Explores the benefits of implementing NinjaOne's Unified IT Management Platform through two customer case study examples.

Situation Overview

IT operations are an essential building block for successful businesses in today's complex global economy. Business organizations across all sizes, industries, and geographies are tasked with delivering digitally based services to customers and employees alike. These services must be reliable, secure, and fast. In addition, as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, many businesses have shifted to remote work and mainly online communications. These distributed work environments require increased security, monitoring, and management of IT resources and business applications.

Growth in Complexity and Scale

Operational IT environments are constantly growing in complexity and scale, with more remote employees and customers and increasing services. At the same time, the volume and variety of new applications continue to rise, putting pressure on IT operations for service monitoring and management. End-user experience is a key success factor. With more consumers accessing business services remotely online, the digital experience is surfacing as a key metric for business success. A company's image and brand are directly tied to the experience that customers receive when accessing a business via the web. Today, brand reputation and service quality rely on always-on availability and rapid responsiveness. Failure to achieve these milestones can damage a company's perceived brand quality and reliability and even negatively impact brand trust.

Managing IT Operations

Achieving high operational service levels requires proactive IT management. IT management encompasses a rapidly growing set of IT capabilities driven by the need to monitor, manage, and optimize systems, applications, and end-user experience across increasingly complex IT environments. IT management includes software and software as a service (SaaS) solutions used to manage computing resources for the end user, small business, workgroup, or enterprise, including systems, desktops, clients, and endpoint devices.

IT management capabilities are often implemented by a series of individual "point solutions" or "best of breed" software tools. Typically, these will address specific functions such as infrastructure monitoring, resource provisioning, configuration management, change management, patch management, endpoint device management, and automation. IT organizations at midsize businesses typically have a variety of these specific tools that they need to integrate and manage, often as many as a dozen or more. This can be extremely time consuming.

Key IT Management Challenges

► Insufficient staff or resources to achieve service objectives

► New IT management responsibilities to support remote workforces

► Increasing focus on security and compliance

► Tracking and managing end-user experience

► Managing a wide variety of tools and point solutions

► Lack of integration across toolsets

Midsize Organizations Encounter Unique IT Challenges

▶ Smaller IT staff than large organizations

▶ Lack of sufficient in-house technology skills and knowledge

▶ Lack of compatibility or easy integration across toolsets

▶ Tighter IT budgets than larger companies

Integrated IT Management: Approaches and Benefits

In contrast to the individual point solutions approach, integrated IT management solutions combine management functions based on common architecture or shared resources. Common architecture can include user interfaces (UIs), dashboards, and data structures. Shared resources can include many forms of management data. Integrated solutions are often referred to as management platforms.

Benefits of integrated solutions include the following:

▶ Plug-and-play toolsets that simplify operations

▶ Unified data models that support tool integration

▶ Increased opportunities for automation

▶ Improved IT efficiency

▶ Improved performance and availability

▶ Improved user satisfaction

Considering NinjaOne Unified IT Management Platform

NinjaOne (formerly NinjaRMM), a software and services company founded in 2013, provides monitoring and management services to managed services providers (MSPs) and IT teams. NinjaOne has since evolved and grown to become a cloud-based software company offering the NinjaOne Unified IT Management Platform for cross-platform management functions to support cost savings and operational efficiency. The objective of the NinjaOne Unified IT Management Platform is to "simplify IT operations, making IT teams more efficient and users more productive."

Its mission is based on four key pillars:

▶ Centralize and consolidate management tools

▶ Align behind modern workflows

▶ Deliver user productivity and satisfaction

These pillars are described in **Figure 1**.

FIGURE 1

Unified IT Management

Centralize and consolidate IT management
IT teams use 20+ tools on average to manage endpoints and support users. Consolidating solutions and centralizing management drive radical efficiency, improve security, and strengthen decision making.

Align to the distributed workforce
IT leaders need to align behind the new standard of remote and distributed workforces, ensuring IT management tools and processes fully and natively support distributed endpoints and users.

Deliver user productivity and satisfaction
Aligning IT goals and processes behind delivering business-user productivity and satisfaction helps ensure IT has the resources, influence, and buy-in to make an impact.

Make automation part of your DNA
Introducing automation across key workflows and endpoint management tasks is key to scaling operations, improving reliability, and driving maturity.

Radical IT Efficiency	Higher User Productivity	Improved Security	Reduced Risk	Reduced Costs
50–70% faster remediation	20–30% fewer tickets	90% faster patching	80% less downtime	≥5% lower direct costs

Source: NinjaOne, 2022

The NinjaOne Unified IT Management Platform provides management capabilities for a number of IT functions. These include monitoring, endpoint management, patch management, backup, and service desk—all accessed by a single pane of glass. The platform is architected and built using a unified data model designed by NinjaOne for cross-platform integration. All platform facilities are built by NinjaOne for integration. This avoids the common problems encountered by users of multiple point products that may not have a common UI or data integrations.

Another key NinjaOne strategy is heavy emphasis on automation—even for monitoring. The strategy includes support for automating specific management functions—even for automatic remediation of known incidents. Automation is key to cross-function integration.

CASE STUDY

Mercer Landmark Leverages NinjaOne for Remote Monitoring and Management, Saving Time and Costs

Agriculture co-operative Mercer Landmark has saved 35% in fees, countless hours, and many headaches since it tapped NinjaOne to help it monitor, manage, patch, and secure its company devices, according to Adam Farmer, chief technology officer. The agricultural co-op, which operates 24 locations across five counties in northwest Ohio, sells products ranging from fertilizer and grain to energy products including propane and diesel fuels. Mercer Landmark installed NinjaOne's endpoint management solutions across its network of some 300 PCs about 18 months ago.

Farmer says his company was drawn to NinjaOne over the two other solution providers it considered because of the breadth of services NinjaOne offers in one package—simplifying and streamlining remote device management. *The other [solution providers] we were considering were either overly complex or not powerful enough,*" Farmer says. NinjaOne also offered ample cost and time savings, was easy to use and install, and featured additional functionality that his company wasn't using before. *NinjaOne allows for more flexibility and the cost savings is substantial,*" Farmer says. *It is critical to our operations today.*"

One of the biggest benefits of the system is the many tools it offers, including ticketing, remote device access, and software patching for updates and fixes across a range of popular software programs including Microsoft Corporation's Office 365 and Windows, Zoom Video Communications Inc., and Adobe Inc.

"Before, we had to have a separate ticketing system, TeamViewer license (for remote access and control), and software update management programs," Farmer says. *"Having all these services combined while also having full visibility has saved us considerable time and hassle."*

For example, prior to NinjaOne, Farmer or one of his colleagues often had to trek to one of Mercer Landmark's 24 locations to resolve issues such as patching or updating software. NinjaOne's remote access management lets them do this from afar, saving time and a trip.

Farmer also likes NinjaOne's clear and easy-to-understand dashboard, which provides a quick view of open tickets by users and displays the current health status of all devices. Red, yellow, and green color coding quickly alerts dashboard users to devices that need immediate attention. A device flagged red, for example, may have encountered a failed Windows software update, or it may indicate that a server is offline. Farmer also likes the level of detail a yellow status can provide, such as a PC that is running low on hard drive space or that is restarting to install a software update. The NinjaOne installation process was also quick and simple. Farmer says Mercer Landmark deployed NinjaOne in about four days.

Today's rapid shift to remote and dispersed workforces amplifies the need for companies like Mercer Landmark to keep a pulse on every device, including being able to monitor and manage devices across a wide footprint. IDC predicts that by 2023, 50% of SMBs will reorganize their company structure, deploying remote and virtual distributed structures through technology. In addition, IDC forecasts that by 2024, 33% of SMBs will experience security breaches quarterly, causing business disruptions of at least one week per quarter. These breaches will be exacerbated by the shift to remote work. Companies will need to invest in remote monitoring and management to help keep these risks at bay.

CASE STUDY

MSP Monarchy IT Selects NinjaOne to Help Its Clients Win the Remote Monitoring and Management Battle

Based in Las Cruces, New Mexico, managed services provider Monarchy IT, which launched in 2015, uses only one remote monitoring and management software provider to help its client base of mainly small and medium-sized businesses in the highly regulated financial and healthcare industries remotely monitor, manage, and protect their devices and systems. Its choice is NinjaOne for a variety of reasons, according to Matt Anciaux, chief executive manager for Monarchy IT.

A main one is that NinjaOne packs a variety of features and functionality into its system, and it's easy to use. *"They don't have to explain anything about how to use it to me or my tech team,"* he says. NinjaOne's Unified IT Management Platform provides management capabilities for several IT functions — all accessed through a single management console.

Anciaux particularly likes NinjaOne's plug-and-play toolset and its modern and clean dashboard interface with red, yellow, and green color coding to clearly display status. A ticketing section monitors active requests or issues, and Monarchy IT can search for specific devices and see their status directly from the console, such as when a user logs in and out, when software is added to a device, and failed events. It also immediately shows device-specific events that could pose security threats—such as an administrator logging into an unauthorized device. *"It's simple, clean, and easy to do things like approve or reject an action on a device like a Windows software update,"* Anciaux says.

"Installation of the NinjaOne software is also seamless and quick," he says. To add the software to an additional device for a business already set up on the system, Monarchy IT clicks an add device button, selects the desired equipment, and then generates and downloads the installer. If it's a new NinjaOne client, setup includes logging in to the server of the new client, running a search for devices, and downloading the installer and then software. *"It takes minutes to get up and running,"* Anciaux says.

This simplicity is key, as small and midsize companies don't have the IT bandwidth to deal with complex integrations. Forty-one percent of small and medium sized business leaders in IDC's *2022 Worldwide SMB Survey* reported not having IT employees in-house. And of those that do have full-time IT workers, 71% only employ from two to four workers. In addition, 30% of medium-sized businesses with 100–999 employees listed "integrated new solution into our existing environment" as a top decision factor when selecting their previous technology purchase, according to IDC's survey.

What's more, most IT technology purchase decision makers are from the business, not IT, side at small companies. In fact, 71% of companies with 1–10 employees said IT purchase decisions are made by business, not IT, executives, according to IDC, and 60% of companies with 50–99 employees said the same. Nontechnical business decision makers are often wary of technologies that are complex to install and maintain.

NinjaOne's technology also helped many of the small and midsize businesses Monarchy IT works with easily transition to remote work during COVID-19 while keeping monitoring and management protocols in place. *"All businesses [we work with] have now moved to some aspect of remote work,"* Anciaux says. Monarchy IT sets end users up with accounts to remotely access PCs on a network from a home or remote environment.

NinjaOne aims to simplify IT management, making IT teams more efficient and users more productive. By enabling a swift and secure shift to remote work, automating processes, and providing an easy-to-use, feature-packed software suite, Anciaux believes NinjaOne is meeting that goal.

Challenges and Opportunities

NinjaOne is expanding its focus as a cloud-based, integrated IT management software platform, building on capabilities initially developed to support MSPs. Key to NinjaOne's success will be the ability to preserve the simplicity of user interface and tightly integrated operations structure aimed at supporting medium-sized IT organizations with limited staff and management resources. Self-service SaaS structure is an essential strategy to accomplish these goals.

Conclusion

Small and midsize businesses face several headwinds to achieving secure and high-functioning digital business applications. They have smaller IT staffs, need to facilitate remote work, and face new security concerns. To meet today's consumer and business demands, SMBs should consider leveraging a unified IT platform that centralizes and consolidates management tools and that offers automation capabilities. This approach can ease integration, implementation, and maintenance headaches and help smaller businesses improve productivity and boost efficiency.

About the Analysts

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Katie Evans is a Research Director in the Small and Medium Business (SMB) Research Program within the Digital Transformation space. Katie's core research coverage includes identifying and supporting the unique, evolving needs of the Very Small, Small, and Medium Business technology buyer. Katie has a strong, SMB-focused research and writing background, having covered SMBs in the retail and ecommerce space for over 12 years. Most recently, her primary coverage area was researching the technology needs of SMB retailers and analyzing the vendor offerings on the market to meet those evolving needs. Katie has also conducted extensive writing and research on mobile and international ecommerce and has authored several custom reports for vendors serving SMBs.

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Tim's coverage includes software and SaaS solutions for managing systems, applications, and IT operations across a wide variety of deployment models including on-premises, and private and public clouds. Tim has published IDC research in market sizing, market forecasting, technological trends, vendor strategies, and IT user needs and priorities. Current interests include IT Operations Analytics, encompassing both log analysis and predictive insights and cognitive/AI technologies.

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