Enhancing Operations Efficiency:
Symantec Delivers Veritas Operations Services

Date: November, 2008
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Abstract: Symantec has launched a new suite of services called Veritas Operations Services aimed at improving operational efficiencies in day to day activities like software upgrades, ensuring best practices and accelerating troubleshooting. Today it will work in Symantec’s Veritas Storage Foundation and Veritas Cluster Server environments.

Introduction

Data centers are in a state of transformation as new technologies are continuously adopted to address rapidly changing business needs. While the goal of transformation is to provide higher levels of service to the business, it often adds a great deal of complexity to the IT infrastructure. Consider service oriented architectures (SOA) and composite applications that are supported by layers of virtualized storage and server infrastructure. The ability to manage “adds, moves, and changes” in these complex environments is very difficult, especially with manual processes and outdated tools, such as excel spreadsheets.

In order for IT to keep up with these rapidly growing and demanding environments, the transformation needs to extend to include newer infrastructure technologies along with better processes in order to enable IT operations to deliver. IT needs to be able to create operational efficiencies where it can and leverage software to automate manual tasks if it hopes to manage a growing infrastructure (physical or virtual) with the same or fewer resources. Every process needs to be evaluated and given consideration for automation. For example, in a recent ESG research report1 on SRM software, we asked respondents to list the challenges they faced when deploying their software. Two of the top three major challenges included lengthy implementation times (40%) and installing and updating agents (37%). Many times the delays are due to non-compatible equipment or software rev levels, outdated information or simple human error. By simplifying and automating the process IT can spend more time on revenue producing activities and less time installing and troubleshooting.

Symantec is focused on easing operational management problems in the data center – initially on their own hugely successful product sets through standardization. Past efforts have resulted in a single, standard interface for all Storage Foundation (Veritas Volume Manager and Veritas File System) software packages and a comprehensive overarching management via the Storage Foundation Manager, which is capable of monitoring and managing up to 3000 hosts through a single console and is available to Storage Foundation customers at no charge. Leveraging the success of the Storage Foundation Manager, Symantec is further differentiating its management products by announcing Veritas Operations Services (VOS). This release provides a collection of offerings that will enable data centers leveraging Symantec software to better understand their environment and therefore manage change more effectively.

What are Veritas Operations Services (VOS)?

Veritas Operations Services (VOS) is a suite of services that will be offered to Symantec customers at no charge. All services will be agentless and offered through flexible deployment scenarios including downloadable software or a Software as a Service (SaaS) model, depending on customer preference and desired functionality. The first set of services being rolled out under the VOS umbrella includes:

• **Veritas Installation Assessment Service (VIAS):** Collects detailed configuration information regarding the infrastructure and validates the ability to successfully install new Symantec software, such as Storage Foundation or Veritas Cluster Server. The Installation Assessment Service covers detailed items such as: License check, OS Version Check, OS patch level check, 64 bit operating system check, OS dependency check, Total System Memory Check, CPU Type, Number of CPUs, Speed of CPUs, Disk Space Check, HBA model number check, Array model number check, Switch model number check and Array Support Library (ASL) check. The end result is a report that either confirms that an environment is suitable for an upgrade or that highlights a deficiency that needs to be corrected prior to installing a patch, upgrade or new software.

• **Veritas Health Check Services:** This service will leverage Symantec’s extensive experience in the data center to provide proactive notification around best practices. Provided data is collected and uploaded to the Symantec operations center, the Health Check will automatically compare an existing environment and provide a gap analysis of potential configuration problems looking at Veritas File System, Veritas Volume Manager and at the server and storage configuration. These could range from a lack of redundant data paths from a server to storage to an inconsistency in mirrored volumes.

These services include flexible deployment strategies that depend on a customer’s desire to share information with the Symantec operations center. The two options are:

• **Traditional software approach:** Download the software from the Symantec web site and run it. Results will be presented via command line interfaces. In order to have the latest information, the software will need to be downloaded prior to each use.

• **SaaS model:** Run the software and upload the configuration to the Operations Center. Symantec has made this option highly desirable by offering incentives—mainly in the form of extra functionality—for customers that choose this method. Take, for example, the Installation Assessment Service: giving Symantec a view of your environment will enhance the service by:
  - Delivering proactive notification of any updated ASL/APM, patches, hotfixes or MP for any previously validated servers. This will include detailed information about the affected platforms and servers.
  - Simplified html-based reports instead of the simple command line interface reports. The enhanced html reports are easy to understand and color coded for the rapid identification of potential trouble spots. Verification is easy to identify with simple color coding: Green = verified and ready, Orange = warning that additional steps may be warranted and Red = failed parameter and action is required prior to installation.

The goal of this model is to help IT create a new operating model designed to handle the massive scale of current and future data centers that is focused on prevention instead of remediation. For companies with strict server builds and well defined change controls, a small set of “gold” server builds can be uploaded for continual verification. Other companies can simply upload as many server configurations as they have and handle the changes on a case by case basis.

The data collected will also help Symantec maintain information regarding hardware platforms and add to its Hardware Compatibility List and Array Support Library. This will better enable the operations center to deliver site specific information about best practices and best known configuration advice to end-users.

**The Bottom Line**

Performing a software upgrade or a patch is part of daily life in IT, but certainly not something that is eagerly anticipated. The chance for something to go wrong and create an extended outage (other than a planned maintenance window) is very real. Manual processes and outdated spreadsheets often result in some kind of error. The Veritas Installation Assessment Service is designed to help IT eliminate issues when deploying Symantec software (new, upgrades or patches). In fact, Symantec reports that early adopters of the Installation Assessment Service have logged 27% fewer calls to Symantec for installation related problems. Automating manual data collection processes will save time and minimize human error.
Enterprises are traditionally stingy about exporting detailed configuration information, so will customers choose to download the software or upload the configuration? Given that the Operations Center will not actually make any changes (all communication is via HTTPS) — only provide recommendations and advice — and the extra value derived from uploading configuration information, ESG expects that most IT shops will take advantage of uploading configuration information. It will still have total control over any changes in its environment and have the expertise of a trusted partner available. Additionally, the information exchange will enable Symantec to better develop its product support matrix.

Symantec is dedicated to helping customers standardize and simplify the management of complex data center environments. Veritas Operations Services, available free of charge, differentiates Symantec's offerings and provides the customer with a valuable service. Starting with the Installation Assessment Service and followed by the Health Check Service, the Veritas Operations Services are a step in the right direction towards solving day-to-day operational problems at a very attractive price! While today, it is limited to working with Symantec products, the future possibilities are intriguing — imagine extending this capability so an IT group could go online and punch in new business application requirements, and have the software automatically verify that the existing configuration could support the change or even offer advice to optimize the setup. A resource to aid with modeling in this way would be most welcome by users.