



Improving Response Time to Users Through Self Service and Tracking an Extensive Network Infrastructure at a Large Utility

Des Moines Water Works (DMWW) is an independently operated public utility providing drinking water to more than 300,000 people in Des Moines, Iowa and the surrounding metropolitan area. The utility was established as a private company in 1871 and has been customer-owned since 1919.

Today, it is the largest water utility in Iowa. DMWW sells water to many cities and other entities in Central Iowa. It also has business agreements with these cities to provide billing and collection services, meter reading and field services.

The Challenge

The Des Moines Water Works is a privately managed public utility with over 225 employees. A two-person service desk team handled support with assistance from the rest of the 8 member IT department. With its large workforce, distributed facilities (over 5 locations linked by fiber optics) and extensive hardware assets, it was essential for DMWW to track and manage support issues within a centralized application. Keeping inventory of its 175 PCs, 25 servers, over 30 printers, routers, switches and Cisco-based VoIP (Voice-over-IP) phone system was another important consideration.

As a leading utility, DMWW was also heavily involved in developing new internal software for its business functions. DMWW was looking for a tool to help track its application development efforts and improve collaboration between developers, testers and managers.

The Choice

DMWW had been successfully using Numara® Track-It!® for both help desk and asset management tasks since 1997. By 2002, according to Patrick Bruner, DMWW's database administrator, help desk requirements evolved to the point where they needed a web-based technology. "The web was very important to us," said Bruner. "We were a PeopleSoft® shop. PeopleSoft was a web-based knowledge-base and had some help desk functions. It was a really useful tool for self-service problem solving. We liked that and wanted something similar."

IN BRIEF

Industry
Utilities

Industry Sector
Retail

Challenge

- Deploy a centralized system to track and manage service requests from more than 200 users
- Inventory a diverse hardware pool of computers, routers, switches and VoIP-based devices

Solutions

- Numara FootPrints
- Numara Asset Manager

Business Application

- Centralized IT service desk
- IT asset management

Key Features

- Web-based access
- Multiple projects
- Ease of customizations
- Bi-directional email interactions
- Auto discovery of networked devices

Benefits

- Improved IT support from all locations
- Increased agent productivity
- IT asset tracking
- Managing software development

While he was considering the option to develop a help desk application with PeopleSoft, Bruner instead thought that it would be less expensive to purchase software from a service desk vendor. Working with Angela Hill, PC Specialist/Network Administrator, Bruner began the search process and discovered Numara® FootPrints® – then owned by UniPress Software – on the Internet. They downloaded the 30-day trial version “We had a web solution set up relatively easily. That wasn’t the case with other vendors we looked at,” noted Bruner.

In making the move from Numara Track-It! to Numara FootPrints, Bruner and Hill felt that both offered similar powerful features. Bruner: “We submitted support tickets with both Numara Track-It! and Numara FootPrints; there’s not a big difference. In fact, some of the models we used for our email interactions for Numara FootPrints came from our Numara Track-It! implementation.”

According to Bruner, Numara Track-It!’s built-in inventory functions were important initially. But as their support demands evolved, DMWW needed a more sophisticated help desk solution that could be customized with new fields, templates and workflows. The key drivers for the DMWW help desk team were both web-based interactions and ease of customizations. “We can make Numara FootPrints do whatever we want it to do and always have been able to,” said Bruner. Asset management was important as well. Bruner knew that he could tap into the asset management functions he needed with Numara® Asset Manager, a Numara FootPrints add-on module that DMWW purchased.

The DMWW service desk team has also come to appreciate Numara FootPrints’ multi-project capability. DMWW’s service desk is just one of nine Numara FootPrints projects, many of which are related to DMWW’s internal application development. Since they started with Numara FootPrints, DMWW has been able to customize Numara FootPrints to handle such diverse functions as software requirements tracking for an internal development effort and bug tracking (see below).

The Solution

For the service desk team, Numara FootPrints has always been extremely easy to install and upgrade. In fact, over the years, Bruner and Hill have noticed that because the upgrades for Numara FootPrints were trouble free, they had to be especially careful to double-check to make sure that everything was installed. Bruner and Hill always assumed it would all work. With Numara Asset Manager, the installation was only slightly more difficult, only because it required an integration with SQL Server. The service desk team had both Numara FootPrints and Numara Track-It! installed in a matter of a few days.

For their Numara FootPrints implementation, the service desk team imported data from his existing Numara Track-It! application into Numara FootPrints. They started out with the default help desk template that comes with the Numara FootPrints product. They have since modified the interface and workflow to suit his needs. Specifically, after learning that many users preferred to interact with Numara FootPrints via email, he adjusted the customizable email template.

Bruner has also tried to encourage the use of Numara FootPrints self-service web pages, which lets end-users search the internal service desk knowledgebase. “Unfortunately not all users are sophisticated enough to search and solve,” acknowledged Bruner. “We haven’t used the public solutions as much as we could because users want a little more hand holding.”

Bruner and the DMWW IT staff were eager to apply Numara FootPrints to other tracking applications. DMWW was undertaking significant software development projects, and the IT developers were looking to tap into Numara FootPrints project management and collaboration capabilities.

According to Bruner, a DMWW software development project – web or back-end infrastructure, for example – begins with a requirements gathering phase. Users and developers then sit down and work out overall specifications. Once they are in final form, the team enters the requirements into Numara FootPrints as a ticket. Developers then take the requirements and work out specific software design module descriptions, which are entered into Numara FootPrints as tickets and assigned to developers. As developers make progress on their modules, they record the latest status into Numara FootPrints. Finally, when the software goes into a testing phase, technicians and users submit bugs into the Numara FootPrints system, which are assigned to the appropriate developer.

Focus on Asset Management

The inventory functions of Numara Asset Manager were also important for DMWW. Bruner: "I've always liked the discovery capabilities of Numara Asset Manager. It keeps track of our extensive network infrastructure." Numara Asset Manager learns

about devices in two different ways. For PCs, a thin-client application is installed, allowing the Numara Asset Management server to collect data and report on hardware (such as CPU type, memory size, number of available motherboards slots) and software (registry, applications) information. But for "unregistered" devices for which the client software can't be installed, Numara Asset Manager sweeps the LAN to record IP and MAC addresses for devices such as printers, VoIP phones, routers, switches, as well as PCs that don't currently have the client software.

The service desk team runs audits of the network – both for registered PCs and unregistered devices – on a weekly basis. The audit information is especially useful in deciding which machines need to be upgraded. For example, Bruner and Hill knew that a lot of DMWW's machines were in their 3rd and 4th year. They wanted to boost the performance of these older PCs rather than buying new computers. By using Numara Asset Manager, Bruner and Hill learned which of those older machines had low memory levels, and they purchased just the right amount of memory to bring these computers up to speed. The service desk team was also able to find PCs that could not meet Microsoft's new Vista® operating system hardware requirements – saving DMWW from purchasing extra licenses. Bruner: "Asset Manager gives us an accurate snapshot of our network at any given point in time. Our registered PCs are updated with current audit information without our having to do anything."

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Patrick Bruner
Database Administrator
Des Moines Water Works

The service desk team has even used Numara Asset Manager to spot VoIP phones on the DMWW network. By probing individual ports on DMWW's Ethernet switches, Numara Asset Manager learns whether the IP device at the other end of the cable is a non-PC IP device, like a VoIP phone. "It discovers the switch as a device, and then you see what types of IP devices are on a specific port on the switch. And you can explicitly assign that port to an office location," said Bruner. This probe feature gives the service desk team the information they need to determine the ports that are associated with a given employee's PC, VoIP phone, or other devices. This information is especially useful when employees change offices or leave the company, allowing the IT department to free up ports for other users. Bruner: "I can tell whose PC is connected to which port, which is not an easy thing to do in the Cisco world."

While he doesn't have exact numbers, Bruner feels he can prove that the ROI for Numara FootPrints and Numara Asset Manager are very favorable. "It's more than paid for itself," said Bruner. "It's crucial to our IT department."

Results

Numara FootPrints has helped DMWW centralize its help desk information, provide convenient access for request submission to users (through emails) and provide powerful inventory and auditing functions. Summarizing his experience with Numara FootPrints, Bruner says that "we know there's more things that we can use FootPrints for but we haven't played with it enough to see its full capabilities."

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Who are we?

Numara Software is a leading provider of integrated IT management solutions for Desktop Management, PC Lifecycle Management, Security & Compliance, Help Desk and Service Desk. Designed to optimize IT management, Numara FootPrints and Numara Track-It! collectively support more than 50,000 customer sites and nearly 20 million IT assets worldwide.



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the right solution for you