Choosing the Right Health Check

For some businesses, conducting a Health Check can be cumbersome, time-consuming, and the results, well, frustrating. However, a Health Check can be easy and rewarding for any business that wants to improve server performance, especially if you take the time to find the right solution provider.

The Anatomy of a Health Check

As you evaluate solutions, consider that a traditional health check is the first of three components necessary for monitoring and optimizing a database environment. It serves to simply but thoroughly measure the performance of your servers and pinpoint specific issues.

Immediately following a health check, you will need to determine the best course of action for addressing these issues. That action plan is likely a list of projects prioritized to consider the scope and scale of each project, the impact to performance, and the required resources. Finally, you'll need to execute on that action plan to get your database environment in tip-top shape.

As you evaluate the solutions available to you, consider these factors: Quality, Total Cost, and Results.

Quality Counts

A thorough, honest audit of the health of your database environment is critical to improving its performance. There are a number of professional health checks available in the market, as well as Do-It-Yourself guides. As you consider these options, look beyond the price tag and focus on the quality of information that would be delivered.

To gain visibility into your database environment, to identify trends, and to treat root problems not just symptoms; your entire database environment should be scanned. Create a list of every database software program and version you use and confirm your solution provider could support the health check for all of them.

Additionally, determine exactly who will conduct the test and what their experience is. A DBA that understands how to dig deep and find solutions is one that applies them on a daily basis. So seek out those solution providers that not only monitor and assess but also provide professional tuning services for common database issues: rebuilding fragmented indexes and analyzing duplicated and unused indexes, updating misconfigured memory settings, balancing availability, completing routine maintenance, and evaluating and forecasting growth patterns.

Finally, ask about the level of detail you can expect from your report. Is the report completely standardized or

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will it be customized to reflect your unique database environment? Will someone be available to walk through the report with you page by page?

Total Cost of a Health Check

As with most investments, the total cost of a health check is sometimes more than the fee you are quoted.

For example, some solution providers require time on-site, so be sure to ask about travel expenses. However, many providers are able to conduct their audit remotely. These engagements save you travel fees, so be sure you understand the technical requirements before you sign on the dotted line.

Also ask your provider when and how long you can expect to have downtime. If multiple scans are required, you can expect longer downtimes, which may be costly to your business. The best health checks are those that require little or no downtime and can be ran on multiple servers at once.

Results Your Business Will See

ptimizing server performance is an opportunity to demonstrate the key role IT plays in your business, providing powerful resources and fueling workforce productivity.

To ensure you walk out of a health check with a clear path to success, start thinking now about who will be there to help you drive change. Anticipate needing one or more DBAs, whether in-house or from your provider, that can make strategic and actionable recommendations, help you prioritize and allocate resources, and execute on those recommendations expertly, affordably, and swiftly.

If those DBAs aren't available in-house, you're not alone. Most businesses benefit from the expertise of an outside consultant, as well as outsourcing the work required to execute on each project. Each project may require a unique DBA skillset, and your project load may ebb and flow with current business needs and the budget available to you.

As you consider health check options, I recommend finding a partner that can provide all components of monitoring and optimizing your servers: the health check itself, identifying solutions, and finally, swift, skillful implementation.

Thinking Long-Term

Whether it's your first 100 days or simply time for a routine tuning of your database environment, a successful health check will point you in the right direction for improved performance and happy clients.

Health checks are most effective when conducted regularly, at least once every twelve months. So the team you trust to conduct your health check should be a team you can envision partnering with long-term, as an extension of your own team. They should also be able to allow you to look back on previous health checks to gauge the success of your efforts. Take the time to find the right partner, and it should be smooth sailing.

You can also read my previous post, Managing A Healthy SQL Server Database: Three Principles We Overlook, for more health tips. For more solutions to common and advanced DBA related questions, head over to Dataval's frequently updated blog and resources section for answers.

Watch the webinar from August 13, 2014 on demand where I host along with Michael Otey, Senior Technical Director for Windows IT Pro and SQL Server Pro. We'll break down common SQL database problems and solutions identified by Datavail Health Checks. Click here to watch the Webinar.

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Andy is a MCITP certified MS SQL DBA who delivers and manages delivery of DBA services to many diverse clients. He enjoys helping his clients by finding and deploying pragmatic and practical solutions for their database issues. Andy is always working to improve and expand his DBA skills and he likes to share the experience via writing.