

POWERING THE NEW IT GENERATION

VIRTUALIZATION REVIEW

Virtual Infrastructure Insight

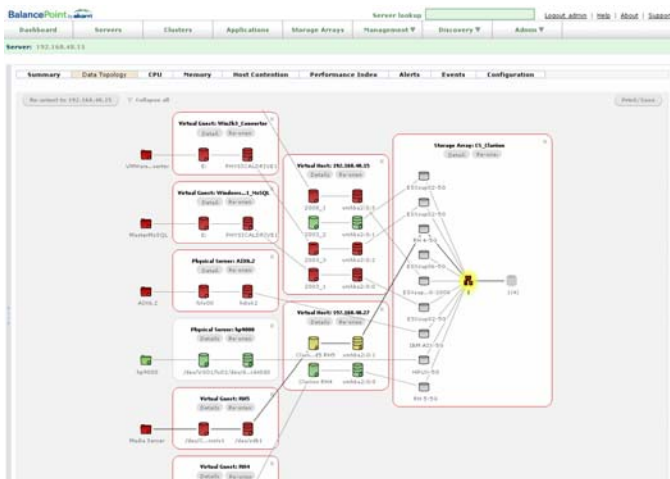
Akorri BalancePoint identifies problems before they impact your business and assists in optimizing your environment.

By Lyle Applbaum • 07/01/2009

As IT departments embrace virtualization to increase resource efficiency and availability, we as IT staff are crying out for better management tools to adopt this booming technology. If you're like me, you've seen remarkable success from your virtualization trials and want to further optimize those solutions.

Akorri BalancePoint is a virtualization management product that helps IT departments better understand how well their virtualized infrastructure is performing as a whole.

BalancePoint can be used to monitor both virtual and physical servers, which is definitely a plus as we're always trying to show return on investment to our superiors. In addition, BalancePoint is a Web-managed product that has loads of charts and features to maximize ROI.



Installation is a breeze. The software is a VMware virtual appliance that can be run on an ESX host-and BalancePoint can additionally be installed as an add-on to VMware's Infrastructure Client.

BalancePoint runs on the Debian OS and uses MySQL, one of the most popular, high-performing databases in the marketplace. There's currently a layer between BalancePoint and the embedded database that will, in future releases, allow you to detach the database and use either MySQL or one of your own. If you're not a Linux or MySQL guru, you can just stick with the Web interface.

One of the fantastic features that drew me to BalancePoint is its agentless server-discovery option. That's right; no install whatsoever on your individual machines. I'm not sure about you, but each time I have to install another agent on my servers I cringe, not knowing how the new agent will react with other installed programs. Not to mention the fact that the instructions never seem to tell you if they need a reboot.

Extreme Functionality

BalancePoint's main dashboard gives an overview of your virtual infrastructure. Here you can see a performance summary of applications, storage arrays and servers in your environment. See an app that's not performing correctly? Just drill down to find out why. Is it a lack of memory, overuse of storage or an over-processed CPU? BalancePoint helps find the answers in just a few clicks.

BalancePoint also provides a visual perspective of your network topology. Do you have multiple virtual machines (VMs) attached to a storage array? BalancePoint's ViewPoint technology can utilize preset thresholds to locate bottlenecks.

You also have the ability to analyze your systems between two specific points in time. Is the efficiency improving or getting worse? What has changed between these two time periods? BalancePoint helps you answer all these questions.

One handy BalancePoint feature is that it can predict the future. Most virtualization-monitoring products tell you when your processors are being over-utilized or if the network activity is spiking, but BalancePoint uses trends to anticipate these events before they impact your business.

For example, it can determine how application storage utilization changes are trending for up to two days in advance, and also recommend changes to that storage. Recommendations may include things like which array drives are best to increase the size of an existing server volume or to which disk group to transfer your user data (LUN migration). In addition to BalancePoint's system-generated alerts, there are also many canned and customizable reports that can be generated and auto e-mailed.

Steep Learning Curve

All that functionality does come at a price. It takes a long time to get familiar with BalancePoint's topology. There's so much detail that it's easy to get lost trying to pin down the source of a problem. Aiding in this process, however, is the incredible Help user guide. BalancePoint has one of the best user guides I've ever worked with, which is good because a lot of help is needed to get started with the program. The user guide is well designed; for instance, when you click on the "Help" hyperlink, it brings up detailed help about the page you're looking at. If only more software programs had Help functionality like this.

BalancePoint isn't cheap. Entry-level list pricing is \$7,500 for 5TB of data, and the price increases from there on a per-TB basis. In this instance, however, you really do get what you pay for.

BalancePoint is an excellent program that will assist you in getting a better grasp of your infrastructure by helping you plan, optimize and choose best practices. It has a steep learning curve, but that's to be expected with an extremely robust product. Akorri BalancePoint takes the thinking out of server management by simply presenting the detailed facts.

Akorri BalancePoint

Akorri Inc.

Starts at \$7,500

www.akorri.com

BalancePoint is a powerful monitoring tool for enterprise environments. It's not cheap, but its troubleshooting abilities can save you money in the long run.

About the Author

Lyle Applbaum is a systems administrator for the Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium. He has more than four years of IT experience and uses virtualization as a tool for his non-profit company to keep up in the ever-changing IT industry.