

KRONOS INCORPORATED RETURN ON INVESTMENT: PRICELESS



Customer

Kronos Incorporated, Chelmsford, MA, www.kronos.com

Vertical Industry

Software Manufacturer

Challenges

- Establish real-time visibility and control over a globally dispersed IT infrastructure supporting an enterprise software development company
- Reduce operational and security risks
- Improve economic return from IT assets
- Enhance effectiveness of incumbent IT infrastructure management tools

Solution

Kronos selected BigFix for patch and configuration management for both servers and desktops. BigFix's unified management platform simplifies both these tasks and enables Kronos' IT department to answer nearly any question about their systems in minutes.

Results

- Ability to globally distribute software updates, policies, patches, etc. to all eligible devices within 15 minutes
- Stopped virus outbreaks before third-party anti-virus software provider could develop and deliver remediation content
- Increased ability to optimize software licensing costs and returns on investment
- Monitor computers for execution of blacklisted software and non-sanctioned activities, such as peer-to-peer data transfers

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—Doug Tamasanis
Chief IT Architect and
Director of Networks and Security
Kronos Incorporated

Customer

Kronos Incorporated, headquartered in Chelmsford, Massachusetts is a highly successful human capital management software company whose products support 30,000,000 private sector, government, healthcare and non-profit sector employees around the world. With 3,400 employees, Kronos serves customers in over 60 countries and maintains significant presences in the US, Canada, Europe, Australia, China, UK, and India.

The Kronos IT infrastructure supports business processes and a user base similar to that of many technology-driven businesses. Kronos locates its business offices and development centers worldwide where the talent is. The company also fields a growing cadre of mobile and non-office based staff, particularly in sales, support and product engineering disciplines. Also, like every organization, it seeks to maintain optimal returns from investments in people and infrastructure against a background of security challenges and rapidly changing business requirements.

Challenges

Kronos initially came to BigFix to solve their patch management problems—patches were taking too long to get implemented and the success rate was less than desired. Similarly, configuration management seemed nearly impossible in such a distributed environment with many systems dedicated to the software development and testing—core of Kronos’ business.

Solution Overview

Kronos uses BigFix primarily as a security tool—deploying security patches and other software updates, maintaining compliance with configuration baselines, monitoring for unmanaged assets, and providing visibility across their highly distributed global network. In addition to meeting their security needs, however, Kronos also uses BigFix as a “second opinion” and functionality extender for third party infrastructure management tools with extensive and frequent use of BigFix custom retrieved properties and Fixlet remediation messages.

Results

Patch coverage is now around 97% with global deployment taking minutes to hours rather than weeks. In fact, security patching and software distribution is so well taken care of that Adobe is now the top patch concern. Kronos has implemented 16 relays, enabling them to cover 55 sites with desired performance levels and real-time reporting. Even engineering groups rely on BigFix reports to inventory hardware installation and usage.

BigFix Deployment Details

BigFix is installed on approximately 6,000 server, desktop and mobile computers. That number fluctuates regularly as new endpoints are discovered – often virtual systems that are created without the standard image that includes a BigFix agent. Relays were initially implemented at corporate headquarters, but have since been moved near concentrations of end users and computers for better performance.

Instant Answers

“BigFix gives you instant answers on almost anything anyone wants to know about the IT infrastructure. How many computers do we have in Australia? Which Pentium III computers are running Windows 2000, but haven’t gotten appropriate service packs? With BigFix, we can have answers to these questions in minutes,” Tamasanis comments.

Instant visibility and the ability to quickly formulate custom inquiries is important to Kronos as many computers act as development systems for the company’s software engineering staff. “Computers used by software engineers, by the nature of their work, can have highly individualized configurations. Configurations can be all over the map and you’ll never know what you’re going to find. BigFix lets us not be confused by the facts when we need to look into computers to find and fix problems. Furthermore, the BigFix Agent is lightweight and unobtrusive.”

Enhancing Third-Party Solutions

Kronos also uses BigFix to provide a “second opinion” to information supplied by other applications and to extend their capabilities. “An anti-virus tool, for example, can only be effective if it runs on all vulnerable computers. But it can’t run on machines it doesn’t see. BigFix helps us validate that AV software is running and configured correctly on machines it’s already installed on, and flags computers overlooked by the AV package.”

BigFix also helps Kronos extend the abilities of non-BigFix management tools. “We have a network analysis tool that tells us when unusual activity occurs and can trace it to specific computers. With BigFix, we can go further to look into affected computers, diagnose what’s wrong, and fix them.”

BigFix’s speed, flexibility, and automation came into sharp relief when Kronos found itself fending off a zero-day security exploit for which the anti-virus solution licensed by the company had no definition or remediation files. “The IT staff thought they would be working all weekend to defend the company against the virus. Instead, we wrote some BigFix custom content to: a) identify machines infected by the exploit; b) remove it from infected machines; and c) to automatically scan the network every 15 minutes for the next few days to find and remove any new outbreaks. We saved the company some expensive computer downtime and staff overtime.”

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Why BigFix?

When Doug Tamasanis, Chief IT Architect and Director of Networks and Security, joined Kronos in 2005, the company had already selected BigFix as a configuration management and patch management tool. Although Tamasanis had no prior experience with BigFix, as he began to use it, he immediately recognized its power and untapped potential to significantly improve Kronos' information security posture and overall IT operational effectiveness.

"Two things immediately struck me about BigFix. It provided extraordinary visibility into IT assets and that it was easy to set up and execute custom routines on the fly. The more I looked at BigFix, the more I realized that we were not using it as effectively as we could, and making some changes in our BigFix implementation would improve its responsiveness and overall value to us. Specifically, we re-installed BigFix Relays to run at local sites rather than concentrating them at headquarters." says Tamasanis.

Looking Ahead

Kronos plans to continue to expand their capabilities using custom BigFix content and will look to other BigFix offerings as business and IT needs change. One area of special concern to Kronos as a provider of HR software, outsourcing, and hosting, is the control of sensitive data.

Tamasanis says that BigFix has easily paid for itself many times over, but calculating dollars and cents returns is difficult. "We know what it costs the company when IT assets shut down, but it's much harder to put a value on things that didn't happen. The same holds true for time-savings and process efficiencies. BigFix might save me an hour here, or a system administrator 20 minutes there, multiplied several times a day. These add up, but who's going to log every minute saved by the IT staff? Or lost productivity from end-users who had to open a hatch on their notebooks to check if a battery is subject to a recall? The gains from BigFix are substantial, priceless even."

About BigFix, an IBM Company

BigFix, an IBM Company, is a leading provider of high-performance enterprise systems and security management solutions that revolutionizes the way IT organizations manage and secure their computing infrastructures.

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