

National CPG Marketer Improves IT Auditing

Advantage Sales & Marketing achieves granular audits and compliance using Cisco's workload automation solution.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
ADVANTAGE SALES & MARKETING LLC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consumer Packaged Goods Marketing Irvine, California USA Approx. 30,000 associates
BUSINESS CHALLENGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of end-to-end auditing visibility and compliance Redundant scheduling systems and manual scripting, and workload management processes
SOLUTION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler including adapters and agents for SFTP, Linux, Windows, and HP Operations Manager
BUSINESS RESULTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Granular, enterprisewide audits and compliance More efficient workload processing, reduced labor costs, and greater resource utilization

Business Challenge

Advantage Sales & Marketing LLC (ASM), headquartered in Irvine, California, is a leading consultancy for the food products and consumer packaged goods industry.

ASM helps clients raise brand awareness and product reach through sales programs, merchandising, promotions, and marketing services. Clients manufacture, supply, or produce popular products that are available through trade channels such as grocery, mass merchandise, and home centers.

A general business audit, along with an IT review, revealed that the company needed to make audit trails of workload processes more detailed and easier to access, and it needed to increase job-scheduling efficiency.

Phil Ben-Joseph, ASM's National IT Director responsible for enterprise infrastructure, describes the complexity of the situation. "We support 5000 knowledge workers, and 25,000 other associates,

and our data centers host a plethora of applications that require a significant amount of scheduling in order to run our operations," he says. "Our mission-critical systems include order management, financials, and retail reporting. All these systems transfer data around for various business purposes."

Some soft spots in the environment are best described by Bobby Jones, ASM's system engineer responsible for job scheduling, who says, "Our audits flagged some practices and controls. For example, we needed consistent segregation of duties for order processing administration. We had instances where systems administrators were also modifying the scripts that define the business processes."

A wide range of disconnected scheduling products was the underlying cause. Job routines were not unified across the entire IT environment, because there was no single point of control for job scheduling or the viewing and tracking of job-process-related information. This lack of control caused efficiency leaks, unnecessary time buffers, job control issues, and challenging audit cycles. The company had no single tool to consolidate its jobs into cohesive, automated workflows.

The staff developed and ran workloads manually, which created lag times between process steps as well as isolated areas of knowledge and dependencies on particular individuals.

The company decided to transition away from multiple scheduling products, manual scripting, and manual job control by consolidating all jobs into a single enterprise-ready workload automation solution. By implementing this approach, the company saw a way to eliminate the underlying auditing and efficiency challenges.

Solution

The company searched for a single product that could cover all of its complex workload routines, execute and monitor jobs automatically, granularly capture and report who does what within the scheduling environment, and alert staff to potential problems. ASM chose Cisco® Tidal Enterprise Scheduler to standardize its enterprisewide workload infrastructure.

The deployment and testing went quickly, with the help of professional services and training from Cisco. Once trained, the staff transitioned from its manual-based approach and consolidated its workloads, eliminating many redundant and inefficient tools.

“The Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler follows an enterprise model of scheduling,” says Ben-Joseph. “We can automate long continuous sequences of jobs that run across disparate systems. We can schedule all jobs with one interface and easily take action on jobs that require attention utilizing the integrated run book documentation.”

Ben-Joseph and Jones also cite the value of being able to automatically trigger jobs based on dependencies or other system events. This capability makes it easier to factor in environmental constraints and prevent jobs from starting before prerequisite jobs have completed. The enterprise scheduler also offers an opportunity for Ben-Joseph’s team to design custom event triggers to suit business needs.

Ben-Joseph provides an example. “The ability to trigger events based on email is a popular innovation that we use a lot in many departments,” he says. “They like that email can be a trigger mechanism for making a significant job execute, because it prevents the need to give elevated privileges to someone who doesn’t understand the application.”

“From the start, with little effort, we addressed our key audit concerns.”

— Phil Ben-Joseph, National IT Director

The staff also appreciates the detailed alert capabilities that notify targeted staff members of potential problems before they occur or become critical, such as jobs that are taking too long to complete. In addition, the staff values the ability to quickly see who scheduled a job, when it was scheduled, what the status of any job is, or who edited a workflow at any moment.

This scheduler is popular, and new jobs are regularly added to the scheduling database. The results continually validate the solution.

Business Results

The company now finds it easier to serve audits and compliance needs, because the staff can easily control privileges, track key workflow-related data, and report on it. The scheduler has also increased workload management efficiency by eliminating manually-programmed time buffers between jobs.

“From the start, with little effort, we addressed our key audit concerns,” says Ben-Joseph. “We set up Team A with responsibility for operations of given jobs, Team B for changing existing job definitions, and Team C for changing the routines themselves. Without this solution, we would have users with unnecessarily elevated access rights to in-scope back-end systems.”

The Cisco job scheduling solution saves the company time on programming, testing, management, and processing by eliminating manually administered buffers between jobs. “We had one complex routine that had many dependencies,” says Ben-Joseph. “The developer said he spent countless hours managing the scripts for the dependencies. Putting that routine into the Cisco solution saves him about four hours a day. And, a different process that we automated in just one day now shaves at least an hour a day off of help desk processes. We have many anecdotes like that.”

ASM has also eliminated isolated areas of knowledge and increased team cooperation. The IT operations team used to depend on key individuals to manually run vital jobs. “So, if a key individual was out sick or on vacation, jobs would be delayed or halted,” says Ben-Joseph. “Now, this tool unfetters those individuals. It is an automated routine so no one has to worry about planning special scheduling coverage on vacation days or sick days.”

The Cisco solution has also helped IT be more proactive and boost error remediation objectives. “When we receive Cisco scheduler alerts, we can learn from them and build smarter routines that self correct,” says Jones. “We also leverage the product’s ability to take action based on the error conditions. Whether it is rerunning a job or whatever the corrective action may be, Cisco lets us take it to that next level to make sure that if there is an automated way to resolve the problem, we do it.” As a bonus, the IT department has not had to staff up, despite the growing number of jobs and complexity of their workload operations.

Overall, Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler helps ASM meet IT audit and compliance objectives as well as its goal to increase IT efficiency. And in the process, it delivers many unforeseen benefits as a result of freeing up individuals from manual scheduling and operations, and making job scheduling functions accessible across business units.

“In the job scheduling arena, this software is as flexible and scalable as your imagination and skill-set. If you understand the enterprise philosophy of scheduling and have the right people in the right positions, you can gain tremendous benefits from this solution.”

Next Steps

ASM is regularly extending the Cisco solution across its environment. The goal is to automate as many ASM jobs as possible and leverage the single view of the enterprise’s processes environment and its inter-relationships.

For More Information

Please visit the product page to learn more about [Cisco Tidal Enterprise Scheduler](#).



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