NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR RESEARCH CHICAGO

Saves over 200% on SQL server management and administration

OVERVIEW

The National Organization for Research (NORC) is based at the University of Chicago. Known primarily for their national studies, NORC performs all types of opinion research projects involving complex data analyses and empirical research. Clients include government agencies, educational institutions, foundations, nonprofit organizations, and private corporations.

SQL Server plays a critical role at NORC as the back end of the survey applications used to gather research data. Therefore, NORC cannot tolerate SQL Server downtime or performance hits without affecting research progress. Before implementing SQL Diagnostic Manager, NORC was using an expensive and ineffective offshore monitoring service.

ORGANIZATON PROFILE

Industry Research   **Headquarters** Illinois, USA   **Employees** ~200   **Website** www.norc.org

CHALLENGE

When Rick Kelly, Senior Technology Director at NORC, first joined the company, their SQL Server environment was very unstable and unmanageable. He immediately began searching for a SQL Server monitoring solution that was effective but also affordable.

Although NORC uses many types of databases, SQL Server plays a critical role in their business. The application that NORC uses to collect data for research projects runs on SQL Server. Also, much of the ll survey data that is collected is held in SQL Server databases. It is later amalgamated into a data warehouse, correlated with other data, and analyzed. NORC project managers also must continually access the SQL Server databases to check and report the progress of projects to clients.

Today, NORC keeps about 30 instances of SQL Server in operation and employs two full time DBAs. Just over a year ago, however, the SQL Server infrastructure at NORC had grown to the point that it needed a more structured, centralized management system. They had no full-time database administrators (DBAs) on staff, SQL Server monitoring was done offshore in India, database management requests were handled by developers on a "when they could get to it" basis, and NORC was spending many thousands of dollars per month for very basic monitoring services. That is when Rick Kelly, Senior Database Systems Engineer, joined NORC.

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information that would take the whole
DBA team weeks to gather manually.

Rick Kelly **Senior Database Systems Engineer, NORC**

SOLUTION

"When I joined NORC, our first task was to get our SQL Servers under control so we could do away with our ineffective and expensive offshore monitoring. In fact, the offshore monitoring was so expensive, it was not cost effective to use on all of our SQL Servers. We realized that we needed a centralized management solution that was affordable enough for all of our SQL Servers, but that was also powerful enough to track performance and alert us immediately if there was a problem. When we saw what SQL Diagnostic Manager could do for us and the price, we didn't hesitate. We got the product and had it running in just a few days," said Rick.

Top 3 reports used by NORC

- Monitoring data warehouse job streams. If they fail, then SQL Diagnostic Manager sends an immediate page so that they can be diagnosed and corrected right away.
- Tracking any SQL Server instances that are not running. SQL Diagnostic Manager can also track SQL Server status changes from running to stopped, paused, or can not connect.
- Monitoring Server Thresholds: If CPU utilization spikes on any production boxes, SQL Diagnostic Manager sends an immediate alert so that the issue can be quickly resolved.

BENEFITS

NORC leverages IDERA products to centrally monitor and manage the performance of all of their SQL Servers 24 x 7, ensuring that they are running in top form. The DBA team now receives immediate alerts if any database is experiencing a slowdown or interruption. Now with SQL Diagnostic Manager, NORC's SQL Server environment runs smoothly with virtually no downtime.

NORC is keeping their SQL Servers running at peak performance and saving thousands of dollars on SQL Server monitoring with IDERA.

IDERA SQL Diagnostic Manager enables NORC's Senior Database Systems Engineer, Rick Kelly, and team to more effectively monitor and manage the performance of their SQL Server databases enterprise-wide. At NORC, SQL Server plays a mission critical role and is integral to the opinion research they perform. SQL Server must run at optimum performance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week — even minor downtime can critically effect a research project. Therefore, NORC relies on SQL Diagnostic Manager to help ensure that SQL Server is always running in top form.

"Now, not only is SQL Diagnostic Manager saving us many thousands of dollars a year on monitoring, it's more robust than the offshore service we had and certainly a lot easier to use. I know we are saving over $8,000 a month in services costs, but I can not even begin to estimate the value of the administrative time that we are saving with SQL Diagnostic Manager. We were doing all of our reporting and monitoring manually and it was being done in off hours by developers. We had a never ending list of tasks and problems to be fixed. Now, with the help of SQL Diagnostic Manager, we've been able to fine tune our environment. Today things run very smoothly so we rarely get an alert. Even better, with SQL Diagnostic Manager in place, the DBA team is able to focus on proactive tasks and growing our SQL Server infrastructure."

"SQL Server plays a mission critical role at NORC. Therefore, our business cannot tolerate any SQL Server downtime. In fact, if one of our SQL Server databases is down for even five minutes, executive management or a project leader calls me wanting to know what's wrong. SQL Diagnostic Manager helps me pinpoint issues immediately and determine the root cause so that I can get it fixed as quickly as possible. If it was not for SQLSQL Diagnostic Manager, our DBA staff would get no sleep. We would have to spend every hour, of every day, of every week monitoring and worrying about our SQL Server databases. We wouldn't be able to sleep at night because we'd be so worried about a database going down, we'd have to get up and check things every hour!!"

"In the year since we have had SQL Diagnostic Manager installed, we have not had any SQL Server downtime that we were not able to correct right away. We no longer get calls from end users saying "Did you know the SQL Server is down?" In fact, using SQL Diagnostic Manager, we are on top of it immediately and we now call the end user, usually before they even realize a problem has occurred."

"SQL Diagnostic Manager also helps if an application issue comes up. The first question a project leader asks in the event of a slowdown is: 'Is this the application or is this SQL Server?' Using SQL Diagnostic Manager, I can quickly pull server statistics; detect long running queries, and more in just minutes. I can even put together a report showing exactly what's happening on the SQL Server. Typically, if someone has to ask me about a problem on SQL, there wasn't a problem. That's because with SQL Diagnostic Manager I know immediately if any performance thresholds are crossed."

"SQL Diagnostic Manager helps resolve a common problem -- troublesome long running queries that cause blocking processes. This type of error can affect the performance of our entire SQL Server infrastructure. SQL diagnostic manager alerts our DBAs immediately if a long running query is detected and lets us know which job is running long, which server, which user, and which workstation. It really saves us so much time and effort."

"SQL Diagnostic Manager is usually the first program I use when I start the day. First, I review the to do list that it builds for me, then I peruse the job streams that are running and check the active jobs and activities on our SQL Servers. But regardless of what day or time it is, I rely on SQL Diagnostic Manager for alerts. I have set custom thresholds in SQL Diagnostic Manager so that someone on the team gets an email, page, or text message if any problems arise. For example, if table reorganizations need to be done, I receive an alert. I then use SQL Diagnostic Manager to analyze which tables need reorganization or if indexes need to be rebuilt. Some of these servers have 50 databases on them, but regardless, I can pinpoint this information in minutes with diagnostic manager."

"We have grown from 3 SQL Servers to 30 in the last year. We simply would not have been able to successfully maintain this kind of growth without SQL Diagnostic Manager, we would have had to double if not triple our existing DBA staff, increasing our costs by 200 to 300%! SQL Diagnostic Manager provides in minutes information that would take the whole DBA team weeks to gather manually. Without SQL Diagnostic Manager our limited staff would not be able to meet NORC's demanding SQL Server needs." "Although we rely primarily on SQL Diagnostic Manager's monitoring capabilities, we've also found its in-depth statistics and reporting very handy. For example, we've had some users say, "I had a problem with my application 3 days ago. I think it was the database." Using the historical reporting capabilities in SQL Diagnostic Manager, I am able to see exactly what was happening with that database on that specific day, proving whether or not it was the database. I often show the actual reports to the user so they can see for themselves that the database was running smoothly."

"In a nutshell, SQL Diagnostic Manager watches our SQL Servers 24 x 7 and gives us complete visibility into their health and performance — and frankly it is doing it so much more efficiently and cost effectively than we could do it manually. With SQL Diagnostic Manager on the job, we have peace of mind and can focus on improving processes and infrastructure rather than fighting fires all the time. And… because we're able to focus on improvements versus problems, our environment as a whole gets more stable everyday."

SQL DIAGNOSTIC MANAGER

Achieve 24/7 SQL Server Monitoring

- Performance monitoring for physical and virtual environments

- Query plan monitoring to see the causes of blocks and deadlocks

- Transactional SQL Server application monitoring with SQL Workload Analysis

- SQL query optimization with SQL Query Tuner

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