PRTG: Collaborating with Richweb to Bring Network Monitoring to the Masses

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In many ways Richweb, Inc. – a fast-growing technology company located just north of Richmond, Va. in the town of Ashland – defies definition. Founded in 1995, the full-service solutions integrator and solutions provider offers its customers everything from fully managed IT-as-a-service (ITaaS) to website design, development and hosting, as well as a broad array of networking services. In fact, there's not much, if anything, in today's increasingly complex networks that Richweb's engineers and networking experts don't address on a regular basis.

The company's customer base is equally eclectic and includes small and medium-sized businesses, many of which rely on Richweb to build and maintain the IT infrastructure required to address their business needs. Clients also include multi-national firms that routinely tap the company and its networking expertise for specialized help on everything from DevOps to legacy system workarounds, security consulting and virtualization. Richweb even offers full hosting services in a tier-one data center it owns that includes direct connections to Europe.

"We're much more network-centric than most VARs," notes Jon Larsen, Richweb's CIO and co-founder. "And unlike most system integrators, we're not looking to sell our customers a bunch of hardware or software. Instead, we're hardcore networking engineers, developers and route-switch guys who can provide 'one-call resolution' to most tech-related issues, help clients successfully complete a large-scale project with technical consulting; design, create and manage our clients' web and e-commerce sites, or serve as a long-term ITaaS partner who can take on all of the responsibilities and tasks associated with an organization's IT infrastructure."

Perhaps not surprisingly, Richweb is growing, as companies of all kinds, including global conglomerates, non-profits, doctor's offices, law firms, schools and others grapple not only with the increasingly disparate and distributed nature of corporate networks, but also the crucial role that IT plays in doing business.

Monitoring Richweb Managed Services

Richweb first began utilizing Paessler's PRTG Network Monitor ten years ago when it began to do more work with Window's applications. At the time, the company's engineers used a monitoring product designed primarily for Linux environments, but it wasn't customer facing and required a steep learning curve to use. Perhaps most importantly, it lacked the flexibility Larsen's engineers needed as Richweb evolved to take on more of its clients' IT-related tasks.

"As more customers began turning to us as a full managed service provider and a cloud provider, we immediately began looking for a network monitoring technology to incorporate into our operations, not only to ensure that we're the first to know if a problem arises, but that

PRTG NETWORK MONITOR

we have the situational awareness needed to immediately address any problems that might arise," says Larsen. "We looked at a number of options and selected PRTG for a number of reasons, particularly its flexibility and the ability it gives us to create custom sensors and dashboards that show in a glance the information we want to see. The pricing that's available for our customers was also a differentiator."

Richweb Managed Services, it's ITaaS offering, takes the burden of managing IT infrastructure off of clients' hands, and PRTG is used for active monitoring and alerts that keep tabs on the entire service, which includes the following components: software installations and updating, server virtualization, remote access, virtual private network, disaster recovery and planning, off-site secure and cloud backup; and web-filtering, anti-virus and intrusion prevent. Larsen and Richweb's teams use PRTG and take advantage of the more than 200 pre-configured, purpose-built sensors currently available not only to monitor Richweb's ITaaS offering, but also its growing cloud. Notably, many of the company's clients use Richweb's cloud in conjunction with popular public clouds like Amazon AWS and Microsoft Azure.

PRTG's flexibility is also significantly leveraged. For example, for server virtualization PRTG is not only used to maintain visibility over Richweb's growing Hyper-V farm, as well as similar environments for VMware's ESX and Red Hat's Kernal-based virtual machines, but also to plan virtualization efforts by determining application usage levels and other factors that are crucial to ensure an optimal deployment. PRTG is also utilized heavily within other managed services Richweb offers, including Richweb IaaS – a robust hosting service that utilizes the company's own tier-1, carrier grade data center, and the company's Security-as-a-Service (SECaaS), which includes consulting and technical services that address everything from managing existing security systems and threat monitoring, to the design of robust systems that utilize Richweb's expertise with data centers and distributed networks to eliminate external and internal threats.

"Monitoring is crucial for security," adds Larsen. "Today's threats can move low and slow, so in addition to looking at the usual suspects, you also need to keep tabs on other indicators. For example, if a server is running a peak capacity for no apparent reason, you want to know so you can take a look and see what's up – for example an open connection that is being used to extract data in a ransomware attack."

Notably, Richweb also provides web design and development, which includes designers and developers that utilize agile techniques to ensure that customers' websites and e-commerce sites are creative, personal and professional. Occasionally, these teams – which also develop corresponding mobile applications also use PRTG in a DevOps capacity.

"Many of our customers are looking to us as a managed service provider that can free them from the burden of dealing with IT, but that doesn't mean they don't have sophisticated networks or technology needs. Many of our smaller customers work in industries – health care for example – in which IT effectiveness is synonymous with business success. So, it's not uncommon for them to host sophisticated infrastructure with us that one would expect of much larger organizations. That's why we always recommend that they also utilize PRTG as well. There is no such thing as too much vigilance. Ideally, we want our customers to have visibility over their IT assets just like our teams do."

PRTG – An Essential Tool for Network Design and Trouble Shooting:

Richweb also utilizes PRTG heavily in its networking infrastructure consulting business, which draws on its engineers' expertise across numerous skill-sets and disciplines. These include software development, DevOps, cloud, virtualization, router and switch configurations, Ethernet, LAN and WAN solutions, connectivity – including internet failover and load balancing – wireless, router and switch configurations, storage, enterprise file sharing, databases, colocation and disaster recovery, firewall design and implementation, and more.

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A "TOP 40" DATA CENTER FOR PAIRING AND CONNECTIVITY

The engineers at Richweb host many of their clients' systems at the Pixel Factory, a tier-1 data center it founded as a non-profit. Lea modeled the Pixel Factory after the European model for Internet exchanges to provide customers in the Richmond area and surrounding rural markets with a low-latency, exceptionally fast and robust alternative to big Internet service providers that route all traffic back through their primary nodes in large metro areas like Atlanta, New York City and Washington, D.C.

In fact, the Pixel Factory is one of the 40 top "peering" or connected networks data centers in the world. It also has a direct connection to Frankfurt, Germany – making it exceptionally fast for sharing data or content with Europe.

"If, for example, you're a bank in Richmond with a VoIP phone system, we can get your latency down from 20 milliseconds to 5 milliseconds," says Lea. "Ninety percent of the time, 20 milliseconds is fine, but when there's congestion on the network, that lag is why your phone connection crackles, why things drop and why your video pixelates."

Lea hopes to use the data center to provide high-speed mobile broadband to rural areas in Virginia and is looking at working with rural electric coops, who can tie into Richweb's fiber to cost effectively create what is in effect a local ISP.

"What we've created is an easy and inexpensive way to bring broadband to our rural communities," says Lea. "And of course, we'll be monitoring everything with a PRTG dashboard."

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Richweb also encourages its customers to use PRTG. Once they are onboard, they show them how it monitors the various components of their own network, set up their deployment and turn it over to them so they can begin monitoring their networks and systems as well.

"When we set a customer up to use PRTG it's really about helping them implement a best practice," says Lea. "We want them to know what we're doing and what we are monitoring, while also helping them see why it's important to maintain visibility over their own network. It's a powerful realization of just how important and powerful monitoring is when they send us a trouble ticket and find out that we've already had an alert coming through and are working on it, or alternatively, that we've already fixed the problem."

The teams at Richweb also help some of their larger customers – multi-national companies that have numerous data centers and complex, disparate networks comprised of legacy solutions – create PRTG dashboards and configurations that best visualize the status of their complete infrastructure. Lea notes that the resulting holistic view can not only result in a much better performing and safer network, but also a powerful compliance tool.

"PRTG, of course, is valuable to use as we're working to address our customers' networking needs and enables us to see not only what's occurring with all of the hardware involved, including switches and routers, but also the applications and devices that tie into the network. But it's also valuable to the client from a compliance standpoint. Many industries require organizations to adhere to strict requirements for everything from how they manage customers' information to PCI compliance. Just knowing that a company is monitoring its networks is often an important first step with auditors. Monitoring lets everyone know you're serious about the performance and health of everything in your infrastructure. And everyone knows that organizations that don't monitor their networks and systems have lots of emergencies."

MONITOR LIKE THE PROS AT RICHWEB

The engineers at Richweb often use PRTG in complex networking projects, but some of their standard uses apply to all organizations. Here are some of Jon Larsen's tips for all organizations:

- Use PRTG to discover what's connected to the network: Larsen says he's yet to see a large enterprise that wasn't surprised, and often horrified, by what PRTG's auto discovery capabilities uncovered.

- Start with the fundamentals: Everyone has to start somewhere. Install PRTG and start playing around with it. Larsen notes that you're already better off on your first day of monitoring than you were the day before.

- Institute a culture that emphasizes the importance of network monitoring and visibility: One of the first things a new engineer at Richweb is exposed to is PRTG. "We want them to see from day one what we're monitoring and immediately understand why it's important. Visibility and vigilance are one in the same. And you can't be too vigilant," he adds.

ABOUT RICHWEB

Richweb, Inc. is a growing technology company located in Richmond, Virginia with a fairly extensive history. Since 1995, Richweb, Inc. has specialized in developing comprehensive technology solutions that have been the key to success for enterprises and non-profits of all sizes. With over 22 years of experience, we have blossomed alongside the technology, growing to offer a wide variety of software, internet, and networking services to fit the needs of our customers.

ABOUT PAESSLER AG

Paessler AG's award winning PRTG Network Monitor is a powerful, affordable and easy-to-use Unified Monitoring solution. It is a highly flexible and generic software for monitoring IT infrastructure, already in use at enterprises and organi-zations of all sizes and industries. Over 200,000 IT administrators in more than 170 countries rely on PRTG and gain peace of mind, confidence and convenience. Founded in 1997 and based in Nuremberg, Germany, Paessler AG remains a privately held company that is recognized as a member of the Cisco Solution Partner Program, the HPE Partner Ready Program, the NetApp Alliance Partner Program and VMware's Technology Alliance Partner program.

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