




RED HAT'S TECHNICAL ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT (TAM) SERVICE HELPS AUTOTRADER.COM MAKE SMOOTH TRANSITION TO SOA

FAST FACTS

Company	AutoTrader.com	
Industry	Automotive information and sales	
Geography	Atlanta	
Business Challenge	Rock-solid support needed to move to a service-oriented architecture (SOA) based on Red Hat Enterprise Linux and off-the-shelf applications	
Solution	Subscribe to Red Hat's Technical Account Management (TAM) service, Red Hat Enterprise Linux, Red Hat Network (RHN) Satellite	
Benefits	Smooth migration to a new IT infrastructure. Immediate response to questions and issues regarding Red Hat Enterprise Linux. Direct access to senior Red Hat technical expertise. Improved productivity of internal IT support staff.	

BACKGROUND

AutoTrader.com was launched in 1998 and over the past 10 years has grown into the Internet's leading marketplace and information portal for automotive products and services. Today, AutoTrader.com brings more than four million vehicle listings from 40,000 dealers and 250,000 private owners together with more than 14 million qualified buyers each month. By leveraging high-tech merchandising techniques that incorporate images, videos, and sophisticated search capabilities, AutoTrader.com makes it easier, quicker, and more cost-effective for people to research, find, and buy and sell new and used vehicles.

In addition to vehicle pricing – including seller specials and dealer discounts – AutoTrader.com posts safety information and provides vehicle history reports, and offers insight into

the auto buying process with information on financing, auto loans and more. In August, 2008, AutoTrader.com ranked highest in satisfying dealers with new-vehicle leads for the second year in a row, according to the 2008 J.D. Power and Associates Dealer Satisfaction with Online Buying Services Study.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

In 2004, AutoTrader.com made a strategic decision to move away from developing home-grown systems toward deployment of off-the-shelf applications. At the same time, the firm wanted to migrate off high-end proprietary SPARC servers to commodity x86 machines, primarily for cost reasons.

“We very much wanted to change to a buy-versus-build mentality for applications, and in the process wanted to move away from legacy UNIX operating systems tied to proprietary hardware that were costly and difficult to maintain,” said Mark Juliano, UNIX systems manager for AutoTrader.com. Open source Linux was the obvious answer, and Red Hat Enterprise Linux was the obvious top choice of Linux distribution.

“We did our homework, and Red Hat came out on top,” said Juliano. Not only is Red Hat the No. 1 Linux provider, but it offers infrastructure management capabilities and toolsets – via its Red Hat Network (RHN) Satellite systems management solution – that are unequaled among Linux vendors. “And then there was the fact that just about every independent software vendor (ISV) supports Red Hat Enterprise Linux,” Juliano said. Currently, AutoTrader.com is running Red Hat Enterprise Linux on more than 350 x86 servers.

But although Juliano’s staff had extensive experience with Solaris and other variations of UNIX, none of the other internal IT staff members were familiar with Linux. Complicating matters, AutoTrader.com was in the process of implementing a strategic, corporate-wide service-oriented architecture (SOA) using an enterprise service bus (ESB) that “had a lot of visibility within the company,” said Juliano. “That project was too important for us to take any risks with it.”

“Any company that has anything important running on Red Hat Enterprise Linux would benefit from a TAM. Even in times like these, when additional expenditures are difficult to justify, the TAM service is worth every penny. It more than pays for itself in the time it saves and the competitive edge it provides.”

– Mark Juliano,
UNIX Systems Manager,
AutoTrader.com



SOLUTION

To get the extra support it desired to help enable a simpler and streamlined transition to Red Hat Enterprise Linux and SOA, AutoTrader.com subscribed to the Red Hat Technical Account Manager (TAM) service. This value-added offering is designed for Red Hat customers that desire a highly personalized support relationship with Red Hat. By subscribing to the TAM service, companies get a primary technical contact at Red Hat who works with them to understand their ongoing technology requirements and provide trusted advice that enables them to optimize their Red Hat Enterprise Linux systems. As companies' single point of accountability when faced with mission-critical systems issues, the TAM tailors support for customers' unique technical and business environments; acts as an advocate for them within Red Hat; and facilitates collaboration with other vendors.

BENEFITS

Although it originally intended to subscribe to the TAM service for only one year – “to get that extra support we needed,” said Juliano – the experience was so positive and the return on investment (ROI) so great that AutoTrader.com promptly renewed the contract for three more years.

“My estimate is that every time we call our TAM, we get an immediate solution 80 percent of the time,” said Juliano. “That’s not just saying he picks up the phone – although that kind of responsiveness would be impressive under any circumstances – it’s that he provides us with a solution during that first exchange.” This is especially critical given that AutoTrader.com has a technically sophisticated in-house support staff that attempts to troubleshoot any problems before getting the TAM involved. “My staff really knows what they’re doing, and have already tried 20 different solutions before they come to me for help,” said Juliano. “And when they ask for help, they need it at a very high level, and very, very quickly,” said Juliano. The fact that the TAM is intimately familiar with AutoTrader.com’s hardware and software infrastructure is critical to making this work so well, he said.

The TAM service has also enabled AutoTrader.com to be more flexible in a highly competitive marketplace. “Historically, flexibility has been our biggest competitive advantage,” said Juliano. “Our ability to rapidly develop new systems that provide our users with additional functionality is key to our success, and our TAM helps us achieve this.”

Juliano said he can’t recommend the TAM service more highly. “Any company that has anything important running on Red Hat Enterprise Linux would benefit from a TAM,” he said. “Even in times like these, when additional expenditures are difficult to justify, the TAM service is worth every penny. It more than pays for itself in the time it saves, and the competitive edge it provides.”



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