

Financial services company boosts the business value of databases



AmTrust Financial Services monitors and improves database performance with Quest® Foglight® software



Country: **United States**

Employees: **6,000**

Industry: **Financial Services**

Website: amtrustfinancial.com

AmTrust Financial Services is a multinational property and casualty insurance company that offers workers' compensation, cyber liability and general liability insurance as well as many other services. AmTrust focuses on the small business markets in industries that include finance, hospitality, nonprofit and transportation. Six corporate divisions deliver the company's offerings. Given its large services portfolio and diverse market segmentation, AmTrust generates and uses a wealth of data. All mission-critical business data resides in approximately 140 SQL Server databases. From time to time, the organization gains additional data repositories when it acquires another business. That also means that the performance and reliability of databases have a huge impact on AmTrust's ability to function and serve customers.

Challenges

To serve customers and manage its business, AmTrust Financial Services relies on information in a large number of databases. The easier it is to observe and improve the performance of these databases, the more successful the company can be. That requirement prompted a search for a different monitoring tool.

Solution

AmTrust selected and implemented Quest® Foglight®, a cloud-based monitoring and diagnostic solution, to monitor and optimize database performance. Foglight provides actionable, real-time information to database managers and their internal customers who want to explore database issues

Results or Benefits

- Enables rapid issue resolution
- Drives code and performance optimizations
- Facilitates collaborative approach to database problems
- Delivers detailed, time-stamped data evidence
- Reduces communications churn
- Allows easy end-user access over the web

New monitoring solution sets up quickly, delivers detailed data

Several years ago, the company looked for a web-based solution to monitor database performance. Its existing on-premises system was balky and cumbersome. The new system would have to be accessible from anywhere and easy to learn and navigate. AmTrust had already had good experiences with Quest software and thoroughly evaluated the Quest® Foglight® monitoring solution.

John Wacławski, lead database administrator at AmTrust Financial Services, says, “We chose Quest® Foglight® software after a lot of testing and comparing of vendors and their products. We opted for Foglight because of the granularity of information it provides.”

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*John Wacławski
Lead Database Administrator
AmTrust Financial Services*

Setting up the Foglight web interface on the AmTrust private cloud was a snap. “From the time I downloaded Foglight to getting it fully set up, less than an hour passed, and we haven’t looked back since,” he adds.

Consolidating database monitoring on Foglight

Today, AmTrust relies on Foglight to monitor approximately 95 SQL Server databases, SQL system analysis services, and SQL system integration services. Two different instances of Foglight watch over production and development databases. So far, database managers convert the databases of acquired companies into SQL Server. In the future, they may rely on Foglight to monitor a greater variety of databases, such as Amazon Web Services, Oracle or SAP.

“We barely scratch the surface of Foglight as a monitoring tool,” Wacławski explains. “We use it for checking, blocking and locking deadlocks, server activity and database activity as well as for running baselines and similar tasks. We don’t look at it constantly, but only if we notice a problem.” Highly detailed and dependable Foglight monitoring largely replaced the use of SQL Server diagnostics and performance analysis. Wacławski points out, “Foglight always has the information for me, no matter what time it comes in. For instance, we can go into Foglight, and it will tell us what happened at 2 a.m. this morning.”

Driving database code improvements

For AmTrust database managers, Foglight logging makes it possible to identify issues and optimize code. “One of the Foglight features that we find most valuable is the logging. It’s very lightweight logging, and that’s something we were looking for,” Wacławski describes. “We wanted a software package that wouldn’t impact our servers while it monitored them. Through Foglight, we capture the SQL statements that are going through the database, the internal customers who are accessing it, and any potential issues that might be coming up as those users interact with a particular line of code. Foglight captures the running code. We can then examine this code, and if we find that it’s not efficient enough, we can rewrite it before we put it back into production.”

Reliable evidence of database performance

The real-time activity screens in Foglight are invaluable in helping database managers pinpoint and address performance issues. “One of the other database managers who uses Foglight generally looks at the locking and deadlocks and at any code that jumps out at him that might not be running as efficiently as it should,” says Wacławski. “The first thing I look at is the baseline. That is my automatic go-to. If somebody is complaining that a database is running slowly, I’ll present them with a screenshot of the chart showing that the database is running at what I call ‘baseline normal,’ meaning that it’s within our minimum and maximum range of how it should be running at that time during the workday. That way, if a system or service appears to be running slowly, we

can rule out the database as the cause and perhaps examine the server, network activity or something else outside of the database.”

Enabling team collaborations and visibility for internal customers

Foglight greatly eases the collaboration between database managers and other teams. When they have concerns, developers and development team managers who are internal customers of the database administration team can access Foglight on their own to review its database performance data and triage whether any problems are happening at a database level or elsewhere.

“When we run into issues, a lot of times everyone’s jumping into Foglight,” Waclawski notes. “People find information and maybe want to dig deeper. I always tell them, ‘This is read-only data — you can’t break it.’” As a result, fewer calls and emails request database manager assistance. “We know that by lowering the number of help requests, Foglight has definitely saved us a significant amount of time,” he adds. Waclawski and his colleagues find the Foglight SQL Performance Investigator (PI) extension to be a valuable resource in working with the business groups. “The Foglight SQL PI capability is a godsend,” he says. “If somebody asks about the servers running slowly or maybe something being wrong with one of the databases, I can jump right into the baseline, capture the screen and share it in the team’s chat.”

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Stellar support addresses issues quickly

Database managers appreciate the convenience of Quest support in helping them work through any challenges. “My Quest liaison is the greatest I’ve ever worked with,” Waclawski notes. “I can’t say enough good things about Quest tech support. They are always on top of things. When I have an issue, I put in a ticket number and, within 30-45 minutes, I have a reply — even for low-priority concerns.” AmTrust is looking forward to working with Quest and gaining the benefit of Foglight as the company evolves. Waclawski is also enthusiastic about the new Foglight interface’s ease of use. “We are anxious to experience the user interface improvements that began with release 6.0 of Foglight,” he concludes. “I’m very much looking forward to the Angular interface.”

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