

SLA

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tem performance is critical for deriving realistic SLAs, whether for internal or external relationships, LaBounty said.

Endorsing the concept of service-level agreements is easier than putting them to use. One pitfall is generating long, cumbersome documents that gather dust.

First, organizations need to appoint enough senior-level managers to give the effort the influence it needs. And internal departments are less likely to rebel if managers resist wielding service-level agreements as empirical proof of their shortcomings, LaBounty said.

"Penalties are often discussed in the context of outsourcing deals, but I think it's even less advisable with outsourcing — where [one is] trying to forge a relationship across corporate boundaries," Tanen said.

However, adopting SLAs — both internally and externally — saddles technical departments with a degree of accountability that many

have never experienced, LaBounty added. But in the end, SLAs are seldom do-or-die, she noted.

"You can reset service levels. Just let the customer know that you realize when you're not meeting the agreed-upon levels," LaBounty said. "They usually understand if you don't meet levels, and it's much worse if they think you're not even aware of the situation."

Although they have yet to become a staple of business-to-business relationships, SLAs could expand to cover less overtly IT-centered relationships, said Traci Gere, an analyst at International Data Corp., in Framingham, Mass. SLAs may be applied to more business relationships, from financial services to shipping, according to Gere.

"You increasingly see the tighter integration of the relationships between the customer and suppliers and your own employees," Gere explained. "In this scenario, it moves the customer from the receiving end of the value chain to the center. In the deals for those connections, SLAs will increasingly come into play."

► Service-level agreements are often overlooked but are crucial to documenting IT goals.

Tonkel

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is the space that we're in.

What we're really trying to do is measure what an application is doing. Report on it, so people understand in business terms — not in technical mumbo jumbo, but in business terms — what the application is really providing. What levels of service it's really giving to a sales order department in Chicago, for example. As opposed to saying, 'This is how many I/Os per second and this is what your CPU utilization is.' I mean, nobody except the guy that diagnosed a problem is down at that level. But everybody is trying to understand it — they spend \$1 million on an SAP implementation.

Don't different people, such as the networking manager and database administrator in the IT [department], already have management tools?

If you're looking at [systems management] from an application perspective. When you're working in the IT shop, what you end up with is all of these little entities that are

stovepipes that typically have their own management tools and work independently. You know, the network guy has his own set of stuff and the application guy has [his] own set and the database guy and the OS guy, and maybe there's even other groups in there. And if you take the application perspective, you can provide all of those people with a common view of what's really happened. And [you provide] diagnostic information that immediately pinpoints whether it's really a network problem or an R/3 problem or a database problem. You eliminate all the finger pointing and that wasted time organizations spend trying to figure out the problem and decide who works on it.

What about moving forward?

When we look at how to make money and how to add value, I would tell you that some very dominant adopters of this kind of technology are the outsourcers. A lot of people are talking about how outsourcing is going to be a giant busi-

ness in the next couple of years. And it already is huge. And outsourcers know these kinds of tools [let you] report on what the application is really doing in business terms and provide high levels of service. They're going to win customers or lose customers or get bonus dollars based on their ability to do this.

"What we're really trying to do is measure what an application is doing."

— Jeff Tonkel, Envive

How would this service-level management play out in electronic commerce?

I can draw a perfect analogy [to SAP R/3 response time] in the e-commerce space: I've got a huge Web site up. I'm Dell Computer and I'm letting people order machines, configure them, and order them over the network, and I want to know exactly what [end-users] are experiencing. And if what they're experiencing in terms of response time is not within what I believe is the right amount of time to make sure that they're interested in doing business with me, I want to know if it was a network, database, or application problem.

Collaborative tool simplifies updates for ETS site

By Jessica Davis

THE SO-CALLED "Webmaster bottleneck" has plagued the managers of Web sites for years. So it's no surprise that Princeton, N.J.-based Educational Testing Services (ETS) — which administers standardized tests such as the SAT and GRE — is facing that very problem.

In fact, under its old system, adding a paragraph to a document already posted on one of the ETS sites could take several days. First, the writer would have to send the paragraph to the Webmaster, who would forward it to an HTML coder. The coder would check the file out, add the material, then check the file back in.

All this amounted to a time-consuming process with very little value added.

"When ETS got on the Web in May 1996, we did it by the sweat of our brow," says Dwight Horch, executive director for applications at ETS. "At that point in time, technologies that are available today were not available. Our site was mostly passive text."

To transform the company's Web site into something that would help end-users and more accurately reflect his organization's goals, Horch knew that a major change was needed.

"We were looking for a technical solution that would empower our content providers to contribute material more directly," Horch

says. "And we were looking to reduce the time it took to deploy content to the Web."

Horch and his team wanted a solution that would fit in with the company's current technical environment — an external site deployed on Unix servers interoperating with the internal network deployed on Windows NT.

"We needed something eclectic enough to work in both environments, while maintaining our production standards and our look and feel standards," Horch says.

ETS chose Interwoven's TeamSite product to separate content production from technology. TeamSite works on both Sun's Solaris operating system and NT, a key factor for ETS. Also, the product is not a database-driven system.

"Many of the other systems we looked at were strictly database-driven systems, which I didn't want because they would require a lot of repurposing of content into the database over time," Horch says. "That makes a lot of sense for some applications, but for us, we had so much content that already existed."

The price was also right for Horch to justify the expense. He expects the system to



DWIGHT HORCH, executive director for applications at Educational Testing Services, implemented a group authoring environment.

pay for itself in about 18 months.

Now publishing new content or making changes to existing content on the ETS sites takes a fraction of the time it used to take.

"It probably saves a couple of days," says Sherilyn Marcy, a Web content manager at ETS — a difference that is very significant in Web publishing time. "We make changes daily. We've actually been able to cut the network systems management group — to their delight — out of the process completely.

We've been able to cut the publication staff down. It's freed them up to use their creative abilities in other projects."

Implementation of TeamSite took a single day in August 1998, and users were up on the system by the end of the day, according to ETS.

Because of that implementation, ETS was able to complete a new project called the Online Scoring Network.

"In our old process we deployed files one at a time," Marcy says. "With 800 files, that would take a long time. It would have been possible without TeamSite, but we couldn't have met our deadline."

Today, using TeamSite and many other technologies, ETS' Web sites are much more complex and interactive than they were when they debuted as simple tools for publishing information.

For example, the site now functions as an electronic-commerce site where students can register for standardized tests that ETS administers, such as the SAT and GRE and various licensing exams.

Students can also go to the site to purchase test preparation materials, such as books and sample tests.

In the future, ETS is looking to TeamSite as a possible solution to its intranet challenges.

"We have several divisions now, each with its own home page," Horch says. "Again, for us, it seems like a good application for this would be TeamSite."

