incognito® software

CASE STUDY

Insight Evolves with Incognito

Insight Communications faced several challenges over the past five years, including the division of its Midwest partnership with Comcast. The two companies announced that split in 2007. The year before, Insight had deployed a range of technologies that helped turn in what President and COO Dinni Jain called the "best operational year in our history."[1]

One of the achievements of that pivotal year was the deployment of software from Incognito aimed at more efficient device provisioning and improved IP address management.

Industry Landscape

For most of its existence, NYC-headquartered Insight managed systems located in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. By unwinding the Midwest partnership, which Comcast inherited through its acquisition of AT&T Broadband, Insight lost the Illinois systems and most of those in Indiana, but gained full ownership of the Kentucky systems and those in Evansville, Indiana, and Columbus Ohio. This left Insight with systems that passed 1.2 million homes, serving nearly 700,000 basic video subscribers, about half as many as it had served previously.

Like most MSOs, Insight faces competition across its footprint from direct broadcast satellite providers DirecTV and DISH Network. Insight also competes with WOW in Columbus and Evansville and with AT&T U-verse in Louisville, Kentucky.

A Busy Year

Back in 2006, prior to the split, Insight executed an aggressive technology plan. It continued rolling out VoIP across most of its footprint, brought its entire high-speed data backbone in-house, raised Internet download speeds to 10 Mbps, and re-launched its digital product. It also made what Jain called "significant infrastructure improvements to better enable customer service."[2]

One improvement launched in 2006 was the deployment of Broadband Command Center, device provisioning software from Incognito. "We needed fast, reliable software that could rapidly respond to customer requests," said Bam Liem, then Insight's Vice President of Advanced Services Engineering, after completing the deployment in April 2007. Liem added that with automated provisioning, local customer support teams had more time for other types of calls.

Insight also deployed Address Commander, IP address management software from Incognito, to allocate address space to commercial customers and produce the IP usage reports required by the American Registry for Internet Numbers.

Deployment Scenario

At the June 2010 Incognito User Conference, Insight Transport Network Engineer Ryan Wilfling reviewed the deployment, post-migration experience and business benefits of the new provisioning system. With a reputation for superior high-speed Internet service to uphold, Insight collaborated with the support team at Incognito to prepare for a successful cutover to BCC, starting with a redundant, clustered design. Rule configuration through walled gardens reduced the need for customized settings, and the simplicity of the BCC Multimedia Provisioning Service facilitated OSS integration. Wilfling called the DDNS configuration "all standards-based."

Migrating data on 500,000 customers also required careful collaboration. Insight used a flat file design and custom import tool and then checked data integrity.

Insight next turned to billing integration, using a Java CORBA interface. "All we had to do was modify our middleware," Wilfling said. The team also used command line interfaces to write custom front-ends for CSRs and used SNMP interfaces for OSS tools.

BENEFITS

- Scalability
- Ease of new service deployment
- Reliability
- Customizable provisioning tools
- Service security

INDUSTRY

- Cable video, high-speed Internet and phone service providers

PRODUCT

- Incognito Broadband Command Center™
- Address Commander

[1] "A Little Insight into Competition," Jim Barthold, March 8, 2007, cable360.net/ct

[2] Ibid.

On the day of the cutover, Insight checked the data again and, after locating deltas, ran another import. Then it allowed unknown modems online and began monitoring performance, taking care not to run too rapidly.

Business Benefits

The post-migration experience confirmed the soundness of the overall design. Even in the case of an impaired file system, Wilfling notes that “the server continued to operate, because Incognito runs on memory.” The support team at Incognito Software was and continues to be efficient, available and high quality. Incognito has also supported Insight’s growth and expansion.

Although overall subscribers dropped by half when the Midwest partnership ended, Insight continued to build its subscriber base to the point where its existing hardware was unable to handle the growth. In the case of its largest system, where DHCP servers were starting to max out on memory, the MSO used a single BCC Multimedia Provisioning Service to split a DHCP service to transition from a two-server to an eight-server solution.

Insight maintains multiple, independent BCC deployments, and deploys updates and revisions first in the lab. The command line script allows for modifying DOCSIS files, for instance, with new speeds on a service package.

That capability speaks to one of the software’s leading business benefits: ease of deployment. “One of the first things to get done is the Incognito software,” Wilfling said. By contrast, billing systems are the “long pole in the tent.”

Other benefits include the ability to build provisioning tools for custom equipment and the reduction in theft that results from moving from static to dynamic configuration files. Undoubtedly, though, the greatest benefit is the one, sometimes unspoken, feature that that customers really want: reliability.