



ServerAssist Product Roadmap

Introduction

The ServerAssist Product Roadmap describes the future developments planned for ServerAssist, as of December 2008. There are two key areas of development:

- Application monitoring
- Core monitoring enhancements

Each of these is covered in detail below. Currently the network application monitoring is scheduled for early Q1 2009, and the core monitoring enhancements for Q3 2009.

Application Monitoring

The application monitoring component of ServerAssist analyses response times and availability for key applications on the network. Four types of application are supported:

- File servers
- Database servers
- Mail servers
- Web servers

File Server Monitoring

The time taken to enumerate the contents of a folder tree, and the time taken to store and retrieve files are monitored, and a response generated when either the file server is unavailable, or the file operations exceed the maximum allowed time.

Database Server Monitoring

For a database server (such as SQL Server), the response time to a user-defined query is monitored, and a response generated when either the query fails to execute, or takes too long to execute.

Mail Server Monitoring

For a mail server (such as Exchange Server), an email message is sent from one mailbox, and a second mailbox is monitored to ensure that the message is delivered, generating a response when the delivery time exceeds a set threshold. The message can be sent using either MAPI or SMTP, and can be

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retrieved using MAPI or POP3, allowing a broad range of messaging scenarios to be covered. This type of monitoring is particularly suited to organisations with a distributed e-mail topography.

Web Server Monitoring

For a web server (such as Internet Information Services), a page is requested from the web server, and the HTTP return code, the response time and the page contents are monitored. A response is generated when the response code indicates an error, the page does not return in a set time, or the page contents indicate an error.

Core Monitoring Enhancements

The core monitoring enhancements are a number of improvements to the deep monitoring carried out by ServerAssist, and extend the ease by which analysis and configuration tasks can be performed.

- Automatic threshold configuration
- Escalation
- Process monitoring
- System availability reporting
- File & folder size monitoring
- Unusual behaviour analysis
- File contents monitoring

Automatic Threshold Configuration

ServerAssist has the capability to collect data values from performance counters, and to monitor those values, generating responses when thresholds are met. Whilst determining which performance items should be collected is relatively easy, since this to a large extent depends on the role of the machine, determining suitable thresholds for those items is more complex. ServerAssist's automatic threshold configuration process provides a "running in" capability, analysing historic data for an individual server, and suggesting suitable thresholds based on the values and variability of that data.

Escalation

Should a new alert be generated as part of a response to a monitored incident, but not subsequently acknowledged or resolved within a user-defined period, a second response, such as an e-mail notification to a supervisor or second-line support can be generated automatically.

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Process Monitoring

ServerAssist's process monitoring generates a response when a monitored process starts or stops running. This provides the capability to identify rogue services running on a server, or in specialist applications, to provide an indication that a desktop process has been stopped. It can also indicate severe system failures, by checking if the Dr Watson operating system error reporting tool is active.

System Availability Reporting

System availability is a commonly used metric in network environments, and typically forms one aspect of IT management reporting. A server is deemed to be available if it has both network connectivity and a number of user-defined services running. ServerAssist assesses system availability at frequent intervals, and produces statistics giving individual outage times and the corresponding overall percentage availability.

File & Folder Size Monitoring

Whilst ServerAssist can monitor the free space on an individual drive, it is often useful to know if the size of a single file, or the combined size of the files contained in a folder, exceeds a preset limit. This is helpful, for example, when monitoring the size of an Exchange Server store, since the total size of the store is not exposed as a performance item, or when monitoring the total disk space used by a number of SQL Server databases and their log files. ServerAssist's file and folder size monitoring addresses this requirement, essentially allowing disk utilisation monitoring to be applied to specific subsets of the file system.

Unusual Behaviour Analysis

The unusual behaviour analysis component of ServerAssist examines collected performance data for "step changes" that, while still within acceptable operating limits, are nevertheless unusual and merit further investigation. For example, ServerAssist would generate a response if the percentage of free disk space on a 100GB volume dropped from 60% to 40% in the space of 1 hour.

Persistent Data Analysis Settings

The analysis capabilities of the ServerAssist user interfaces allow the display of specific events and detailed examination of performance data, "zooming in" on a specific part of the data, in order to carry out any investigation that may be required. It may take some time to build up the precise settings required to investigate a particular issue, and these settings

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can be saved and restored as required, eliminating repeated configuration effort.

File Contents Monitoring

Third-party applications sometimes log to text-based files, rather than the Windows event log. ServerAssist's file contents monitoring examines the contents of log files, looking for specific keywords, and generates a response when one of the keywords is found.

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