Tableau Software Combines BlazeMeter and New Relic Metrics Within a Single Interface on an Open, Extensible Platform

Tableau Software (NYSE: DATA) helps people – from individuals to enterprises – see and understand their data like never before. The company develops business intelligence solutions to make data analysis fast, easy, beautiful and useful for anyone and everyone. Created by computer scientists at Stanford in 2003, the company grew its revenue from $34.2 million in 2010 to $127.7 million in 2012. Tableau went public on the New York Stock Exchange in May 2013.

Environment
Tableau uses Drupal. Its main corporate website is self-hosted, with secondary sites hosted on Pantheon.

Challenges
When Eric Peterson joined Tableau in 2011, he began working in the marketing department’s development team. The team was responsible for managing a number of Drupal web applications, including the main corporate website – but he soon found himself facing considerable limitations. “The network operations team was handling all of our monitoring,” he explains. “We had very little access to their monitoring data, so we had almost no insight into the issues we were facing in production. We were basically flying blind.”
Solution
After managing Tableau’s web properties with very little visibility into key performance metrics, Peterson and his team began looking for a better solution. “In 2012, New Relic introduced support for Drupal, so that was our signal to check it out,” he says. “After deployment – which took maybe an hour at most – we gained instant access to the kind of data we’d been lacking for months.”

For Peterson, the New Relic dashboard is a one-stop shop for critical information on real time application performance. “There’s one screen with all the data you need for high level visibility,” he says. “Then you can drill down to get deeper insights as necessary. I especially like the Transaction Traces feature, which shows me the exact line of code that’s causing an issue.”

With help from the New Relic Apdex score, Peterson and his team were able to address a problem that otherwise might have gone unnoticed. “Every night at three a.m., the Apdex score would drop below our preferred threshold,” he says. “It turned out that our nightly database backup was causing the problem and it was impacting performance across the site. The issue wasn’t severe enough to trigger our other alerting mechanisms, but with help from New Relic we were able to address the problem before it got any worse.”

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Eric Peterson
Drupal Web Developer, Tableau Software

Peterson is especially happy with the New Relic mobile app, which sends an alert to his phone anytime the site experiences a performance issue. He also appreciates the weekly email digests that give him a quick snapshot of uptime, average response times and other key performance metrics. “New Relic simply gives me the critical information I need, when I need it,” he says. “I keep it open during every deployment, just to make sure that we’re not impacting users in any way. It’s a tremendously useful tool.”

In recent months, New Relic has become even more useful with the introduction of the New Relic Platform. This platform presents metrics from different technologies in a single interface, giving instant visibility into all monitoring data in a consistent, familiar way. “We use BlazeMeter, which is a cloud-based load testing framework,” says Peterson. “Before the New Relic Platform became available, I would look at the BlazeMeter metrics in one window, then open New Relic in another window to see how our application was responding to different load levels. Now I can put a BlazeMeter plugin into my New Relic interface and see it all in a single visualization at once.”

With the success of the BlazeMeter plugin, Peterson and his team intend to explore other plugins available on the New Relic Platform. “We’re just getting started,” he says. “I see that there’s a Memcached plugin, so I definitely want to give that a try. And who knows? We may even write our own plugins to address some of the unique issues we face here at Tableau.”
Results

For Peterson, the ethos of the New Relic Platform aligns perfectly with his own approach to development. “I’m a Drupal developer,” he says. “I appreciate modular plugin architectures that let you choose between pre-built solutions or building your own. I like having the ability to resolve issues on my own without requiring intervention from New Relic or anybody else — that’s just something I value coming from an open source background.”

With the BlazeMeter plugin, Peterson can gain access to historical data far more easily than before, giving him an even broader view of application performance over time. “If I want to look at a prior load test, I don’t need to go to the BlazeMeter site anymore,” he says. “Finding historical data is no longer as tedious as it used to be. Now, I simply use the New Relic interface to find the data I need. The New Relic Platform doesn’t just improve visibility at a single moment in time — it improves visibility across the history of our application.”

With that level of visibility, Peterson is better equipped to discover problems he didn’t even know existed. “As we’ve scaled out to multiple servers, we’ve started running into odd issues,” he says. “For example, we noticed that a specific host was getting a whole bunch of 500 errors, but we didn’t understand why. Digging into the Transaction Traces in New Relic, we were able to see that the problem originated from a syncing issue unique to Drupal. It wasn’t a huge problem yet, but it was bound to become much worse. New Relic helped us nip it in the bud.”

These days, Peterson spends a lot less time worrying about the current state of Tableau’s web applications. “I would still be flying blind without New Relic,” he says. “I could get my job done, but frankly it wouldn’t be as easy and it wouldn’t be as fun. It’s truly an enjoyable thing for me to dig through application data, discover issues and fix them. New Relic makes it possible for me to spend much more of my day doing precisely that.”

Eric Peterson  
Drupal Web Developer, Tableau Software

About New Relic

New Relic is an all-in-one SaaS-based application performance management solution that provides comprehensive, real time visibility into web and mobile applications regardless of where they’re run. Our platform combines Real User Monitoring, web monitoring, server monitoring, and iOS and Android mobile monitoring in one powerful dashboard experience. Our 40,000+ customers use our cloud solution every day to optimize over 108 billion daily performance metrics. Learn more at: newrelic.com.

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