Boosting Hybrid Productivity with DEM

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Two years into the pandemic era, it's clear that the hybrid workplace model is here to stay. And along with new opportunities, it brings new challenges.

Recent EMA Research found 82 percent of IT leaders view Microsoft 365 (M365) as mission critical or of high importance. The research also noted that 21 percent state an outage has a critical impact on the organization to the degree that business productivity grinds to a halt. What is almost as shocking is that just 10 percent report having proactive or end-to-end views of these critical applications.

This gap becomes even more pronounced when it comes to managing Microsoft Teams (Teams) performance. The hybrid workplace has increased reliance on these cloud collaboration capabilities for almost all enterprises, with 82 percent reporting usage at least doubling.

DEM is gaining popularity

With a hybrid workforce as our new reality, digital experience monitoring (DEM) is taking on an integral role in organizations' productivity and viability. Enterprise software is expected to lead IT buying with more than 11 percent growth from 2021 to 2028, according to recent research. More specifically, the market for M365 DEM is expected to grow. Ten percent of companies employing M365 used a third-party tool for DEM, and Gartner forecasts this will grow to 50

percent by 2025. M365 and Teams usage has grown exponentially in the last 24 months—over 200 percent in the case of Teams.

Hybrid is the dominant work mode driving IT spending. [Gartner](#) has said that the digital transformation increase we witnessed throughout the pandemic will continue into 2024. Businesses will need to make the necessary investments to become fully functional in the cloud.

According to the EMA survey, the hybrid workplace has driven a doubling of M365 and Teams usage by surveyed businesses. Managing its performance in this new work environment is more challenging, and just 10 percent of companies currently have tools that provide the needed insight.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation projects that were originally expected to take months or even years. Teams played a key role in this forward movement. For many enterprises, Microsoft Teams was initially set up in the early stages of the pandemic as a quick solution to keep business going remotely, without much thought put into how its use factors into long-term plans or how it forms a key part of an enterprise's strategy.

The recent EMA survey found that half of the businesses polled had M365 deployed for less than two years. Interestingly, the survey noted that the criticality of M365 went up the longer an enterprise had the service deployed. This finding continues to underscore the importance of critical DEM tools, particularly because a lag between deployment during the COVID-19 pandemic and the recognition that any problems affecting its performance will have a huge and negative impact on a business.

Hybrid organizations need to adopt DEM in 2022

The above survey insights drive home why DEM adoption in 2022 should be priority number one. Existing monitoring tools have limitations when it comes to managing the performance of cloud-based tools like M365. With much of the business world shifting to cloud software to accommodate remote and hybrid work scenarios, it has created a significant problem for IT.

Native tools as well as application performance management (APM) and network performance management (NPM) often indicate an application or network is available or in good health. Despite a positive report, users can and likely are experiencing problems. The disconnect between IT and the user typically stems from the lack of visibility into the cloud or at the user level. What's more, IT departments often don't have depth of visibility into M365 and Teams.

So, what can hybrid organizations do to adopt DEM in 2022? What should they look for in a solution? Consider the following.

Leverage multiple monitoring technologies

Look for a solution that employs multiple monitoring technologies and data sources. Leveraging multiple monitoring technologies, such as synthetic and real user monitoring, offers a more proactive approach to DEM, which is key in mitigating downtime and quickly remediating issues. Technologies that continuously examine and simulate M365 and Teams user activity—including traffic and transactions—can help IT departments pinpoint service quality patterns and drops more quickly, often providing insights on potential problems before they impact users. Such solutions provide crucial information on impacted location and service as well as the scope of the problem and root cause, enabling IT to address and resolve issues expediently, often before the user even experiences a problem.

Look for a DEM solution designed for hybrid

Demand a solution that enhances productivity and profitability within your hybrid workforce operations. While Teams is a powerful productivity tool in and of itself, there are many issues which are not related to Microsoft Teams at all that can impact the Teams user experience. Whether these are connectivity problems between the user and Teams related to the ISP or cloud provider, or a device-related issue along the network path, IT will spend too many cycles detecting and identifying the scope and source of Teams performance issues if they don't have a DEM solution designed for M365 and Teams. A DEM solution that provides a clear, comprehensive dashboard in real-time with an end-to-end view of nearly everything that sits between the user and M365—including endpoint performance, private network infrastructure and ISP performance—will provide better insight into whether something isn't performing properly at each juncture on the path to Teams. An effective dashboard will provide a big picture vantage point of Teams connectivity in its current state as well as actionable insights to lessen downtime.

Leverage the power of agentless monitoring tools

An effective DEM provider will offer agentless monitoring of your individual users and their activities to recognize performance issues and causes, whether at home or in the office. Since Teams is a cloud-based service, issues are not always so easy to find and resolve. The ability to quickly understand organization-wide performance of M365 and Teams can grind to a halt if you must first deploy agents to all endpoints in your organization. Moreover, issues often are nuanced and rarely the sole fault of the user or the service. Typically, the problem—including the endpoint, initial network connectivity (WiFi, wired), network routing, latency introduced by network hairpin turns to internal services, Internet latency, and even Microsoft servers—lies somewhere between the user and the service. So, it's important to find insightful data sources that can help with analysis and identification of the performance problem's source. By maintaining visibility, it's possible to see the optimization of your hybrid workforce, rather than a one-time attempt in improving Teams service quality. As a result, both the user's experience and the service team's performance will improve.

Ask about network path monitoring

Find out if your solutions provider offers network path monitoring. Prior to the pandemic, most of us worked in the office on the same network. Today, since many of us work remotely, we operate from different networks and ISPs, which can experience problems ranging from connectivity and latency to routing and outage issues. Consequently, it is more difficult for IT departments to detect and remediate an issue because it could stem from a network that IT doesn't own or control. A good solutions provider will offer network path monitoring, providing visibility into every network involved in a user's experience of M365 and Teams from end-to-end, including those your organization doesn't own or control. It also should offer a visual map of the route users take to the cloud—complete with hop analysis—enabling IT departments to quickly spot and identify whether the issue is with Microsoft, an ISP or the user's own network.

Ask about call quality context

It's one thing to know that call quality has dropped. It's quite another to have context around these drops and other voice quality issues. Your solutions provider should offer a feature that proactively gives insight into the causes of call quality drops as well as call quality patterns over a period, at the user level or for groups of users such as VIPs. Because many organizations use Teams with PSTN connectivity for calling (Calling Plans, Direct Routing and Operator Connect), you should insist on a solution that can differentiate these calls from Teams video calls and provide insight into the many factors influencing their call quality (such as session border controller, carrier, and more). An effective solution will alert your IT team to call quality issues affecting a user or group of users and provide actionable data to better home in on where the bottleneck is that is causing call quality issues within your organization and, potentially, prevent future service quality problems.

Conclusion

Consistent service quality and performance are critical to the productivity of organizations operating in a hybrid model and reliant on cloud collaboration tools such as M365 and Teams. The key is to arm IT teams with the right tools to ensure that all users regardless of their location and network have a consistent Teams and M365 experience.

By addressing the challenges around users' connectivity to Teams—and ensuring that each is appropriately optimized—your organization can improve service quality levels and user experience for your entire hybrid workforce. This move offers a great return on your cloud productivity suite investment, boosting your enterprise's productivity and user satisfaction, while reducing downtime and alleviating your IT department's workload.