

SuperSport, Africa's largest sports portal, uses Qualica's UEM platform for proactive monitoring of customer experiences

Synopsis

SuperSport, the largest sports portal in Africa, is ensuring optimal experience for its online visitors through strategic use of User Experience Monitoring (UEM) from Qualica. The major benefit is proactive problem-solving, ensuring that visitors do not turn to alternative sites because of poor experience, and increasing positive brand perception.

Customer Profile:

SuperSport New Media is the interactive arm of SuperSport, the biggest provider of premium **pay-television sports coverage across the continent of Africa**. It delivers content into the new media environment – online, mobile and interactive television.

SuperSport develops, hosts, manages and maintains more than 40 sports websites, including the majority of South Africa's prime sports websites, such as those of SA Rugby and the Premier Soccer League. The SuperSport stable of web sites are visited by close to a million unique users each month.

Along with MultiChoice Africa and M-Net, SuperSport is a wholly owned subsidiary of the MIH Group, which is listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, NASDAQ and the Amsterdam Stock Exchange.

Challenge:

SuperSport wanted to understand how its customers were experiencing the online services it delivered, as this has major implications for the perception of its brand.

The SuperSport website is the largest sports portal in Africa. The websites it hosts are often image-rich and feature video clips as well as heavy branding, all of which impact download times. In addition, this content is served in a high-intensity, time-constrained environment.

"Essentially we make sports information available to users anywhere, whenever they want it, and in whatever format they require," says Johan Huyser, technical manager at SuperSport New Media.

It was therefore essential for SuperSport to monitor user experience to ensure proactive identification of any problems. The organisation also needed to check the uptime of its service provider, and how well content was being delivered from its servers.

It also wanted to investigate specific problems, for example, why ex-pats abroad were experiencing slow download times.

"We need constant user experience and uptime monitoring," says Huyser. "We cannot simply rely on what our internet service provider (ISP) tells us."

"Observing customer experience is hugely important. If our site doesn't load in time users will go elsewhere – and we want them to stay with us."

Johan Huyser,
Technical Manager,
SuperSport New Media

Solution:

To gain proactive insight into how users were experiencing the performance of its online offerings SuperSport invested in User Experience Monitoring (UEM) from South African company, Qualica, at the beginning of 2008.

The solution proactively monitors all the SuperSport-hosted websites by replicating end-user actions on a continuous basis. Detailed statistics about the user experience are uploaded in real-time to a central management server for analysis and reporting.

Qualica developed the scripts, or series of steps that run against the websites. These run on a number of collectors in different cities in South Africa, as well as one in London. Qualica also held an initial series of workshops to provide professional analysis, which resulted in a number of quick wins to optimise performance before SuperSport honed in on problem areas.

Results:

SuperSport is now able to monitor exactly what its users experience, and be proactive about attending to problems when these are identified.

It can drill down into realtime user experience data to identify exactly what the problem is. It can distinguish, for example, between application, infrastructure and network problems, enabling the SuperSport New Media technical team to pinpoint and fix any problem timeously, before it impacts users.

“The UEM tool enables us not only to see problems, but to understand the ‘how’ and ‘why’ as well,” says Huyser. “We can drill down into the data to discover why content is served slower in one city than another, for example.

SuperSport can see where bottlenecks occur in the system, and therefore how to alleviate them. Huyser cites an example: “The SA Rugby website was taking too long to download. We discovered that huge images, which took ages to download, were being served first. This meant that the text content would only become available once the photographs had loaded. It was a simple matter to swap these so that the text was served first.”

Huyser describes Qualica’s customer service as really good. “They are always checking to find out if we need help, and our experience of them is very positive,” he says.

SuperSport New Media is amalgamating into DSTV Online and plans to continue and extend its use of Qualica’s UEM platform.

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