ap *Application Performance*
Passionate about performance

Faster SharePoint combined with continual real end-user performance monitoring make all the difference at COWI
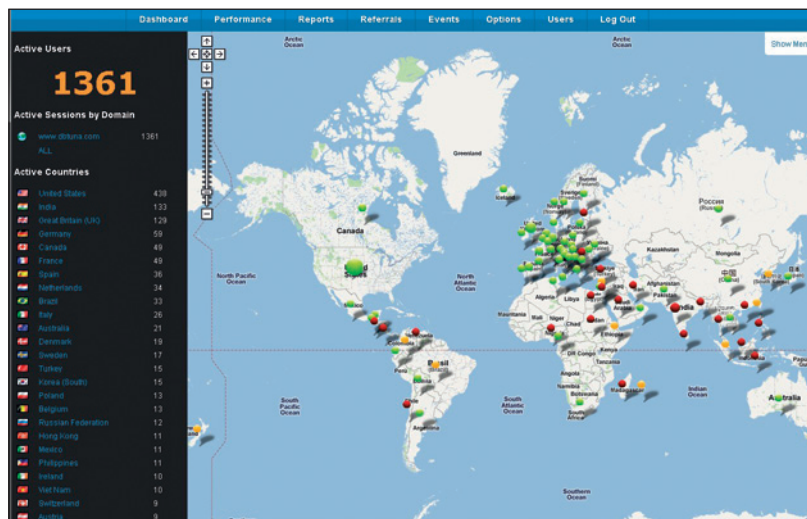
COWI

COWI is a Danish consulting group with a team of over 6,000 employees working together with external partners, coordinating more than 15,000 projects on behalf of customers around the world. Slick communication is a fundamental requirement and slow SharePoint performance was getting in the way of business.

Using SharePoint as a primary means of communication, the business created an intranet known as COWIportal that was deployed worldwide. Having run into performance problems COWI engaged with Application Performance in order to deploy its WebTuna product, to truly understand the performance and quality of service being provided to end-users, and Aptimize SharePoint Accelerator to improve the speed of the site, particularly when users are located many thousands of miles from the datacentre in Denmark.

WebTuna Geo-Dashboard - visualise website end-user performance in real-time by their exact location.

We spoke with Frederik Bonde Nielsen, COWI's Chief Portal Specialist, to gain a better understanding of the issues that sparked interest in these innovative technologies and the benefits they are already seeing.

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"We did an IT survey last December and some of the feedback we received said COWIportal was 'slow', he explained. "Now, slow can mean many things – it can mean the time taken to display a webpage, download a file or even having too many clicks to get to where you want to go on the Portal. Either way, we realised we needed to understand more about what our customers were actually experiencing and also improve performance in order to save time and to help our team become more effective in their use of COWIportal.
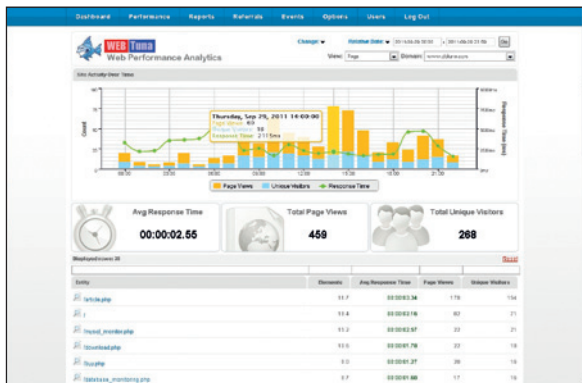
A world-wide SharePoint requirement

"COWIportal governs our communications process in all parts of the business – network news, the sales process, business support, IT and purchasing. Around the globe we are adding 4000 to 5000 projects every year, each of which uses a customised SharePoint template in order to invite customers and external partners to collaborate.

"COWIportal processes phenomenal amounts of transactions daily and we've seen that even small incremental performance gains on each transaction amounts to an enormous time saving and greatly increased productivity overall. In addition, because we can monitor in detail the performance we deliver to our users around the world, there is increased confidence in our SharePoint system and greater buy in – better performance means a more responsive and easier to use system.

Historical Performance Analysis – drilldown into granular historical data.

Powerful Reporting – key performance indicator heatmap report.

Improvement in performance

"We had already worked a lot on our own code to get performance enhancements but we realised we needed some new ideas; we then contacted Application Performance and agreed to install Aptimize SharePoint Accelerator to accelerate the sites.

"Already we can measure an improvement of 33% overall which translates into a 1 second saving per transaction locally (average page load times have reduced from 3 seconds to 2)and in the Gulf region in particular we have seen even bigger gains. So for our 500 employees working in that region Aptimize is helping ensure that they can adopt our intranet Portal even when they are constrained by slower networks with greater latency, caused by the sheer distance between user and the data they rely on – the successful deployment of Aptimize has been a big deal for us.

"It takes time to change user perceptions – we estimate about 6 months – but I am confident that we will soon report improved anecdotal user experience which is just as important as the statistical evidence.

Understanding REAL end users experience

"Sitting in Copenhagen close to the datacentre it's hard to fully appreciate that not everyone sees what we see or experiences what we do. Key to the whole improvement effort is to understand our users' real experience and performance better. To do this, we originally used a PC based monitoring tool but this was not monitoring all our users and had to be moved from location to location which was simply not practical.

"When Application Performance introduced us to WebTuna we immediately understood that it offered the real end user experience information we wanted to monitor. Now we can continually monitor the end user experience and even trace how they navigate through the site.

"One of the most surprising things we have learned about COWIportal use, is that we now have people from 65 countries accessing SharePoint every month; we simply had no idea before.

"Using WebTuna we can now monitor and track over time what portal users experience anywhere in the world, in real time. We are now able to better understand our users' frustrations and we focus our improvements on what makes the biggest difference. Continuous monitoring with WebTuna now means we can pre-empt issues and quickly work to resolve problems before they get out of hand.

"The guys at Application Performance have helped us implement two really important tools – Aptimize SharePoint Accelerator and WebTuna – into a complex system; they were really proactive at helping us get the installation absolutely right and are certainly part of our team going forward."