SIOS AppKeeper Gives Hobby Japan Peace of Mind and Enables Employees to Produce the Best Content Possible

SIOS AppKeeper enables staff to focus on content development without worrying about EC2 server downtime

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"We cannot prevent configuration errors or load issues. But SIOS AppKeeper is very good for my peace of mind. With AppKeeper, our staff is not being called every time a system or server failure occurs," said Yuichiro Fukabori of Hobby Japan. "Our goal is to create a maintenance-free, low-cost environment and SIOS AppKeeper helps us do that."

Hobby Japan is a publishing company with diverse businesses related to hobbies (e.g. anime, action figure collecting, card games, etc.) that includes publishing young-adult books and magazines such as "Hobby Japan", "Monthly Arms" and "Card Game." The company also sells figures and character goods, game planning tools, and imports and selling analog games. Yuichiro Fukabori from the Public Relations, Business Administration department of Hobby Japan describes the company as "a general trading company that offers almost everything related to hobbies."

The Environment

Hobby Japan does not have a dedicated IT department. Many of its employees hold multiple roles, and while he is a member of the public relations team, Mr. Fukabori also manages the company's web servers. "Since there is no IT department within the company, I am in charge of the operation of all servers except those that are managed by each department," said Mr. Fukabori. It is easy to imagine that he is in a difficult situation.

Hobby Japan used to rely on a hosting services company to manage their web server, but they experienced a disaster when they had a hard drive failure. While they were able to eventually recover the data, the situation exposed that they needed better data backup and security processes.

Cloud services were becoming more popular in Japan, so Mr. Fukabori led the effort to transition the company to the cloud. Hobby Japan migrated to Amazon Web Services (AWS) in 2013, freeing them from various problems they had experienced in the past.

But website traffic started to increase steadily, putting pressure on their environment. Mr. Fukabori was tasked with addressing this issue.

The Challenge

Hobby Japan was monitoring their EC2 environment with AWS Cloud Watch. But Mr. Fukabori was unable to respond properly when the web server traffic spiked, such as when the Monthly Hobby Japan issue was posted. He only received a notification at the time of the server downtime.

Moreover, he noted,"When our content was introduced on a popular video site or our figures were posted on Twitter, we also experienced unexpected increases in server traffic, frequently resulting in more downtime," he said.

The company was experiencing systems issues about 10 times a month and Mr. Fukabori was busy addressing them. Alerts would often occur in the middle of the night, disturbing Mr. Fukabori's sleep and home life. He thought, "I can't handle this by myself" and asked AWS for help.

AWS introduced Hobby Japan to ForgeVision, Inc, an AWS consulting partner that provides cloud integration services. ForgeVision proposed three improvements and implemented them in August 2018.

The first was to implement auto-scaling for Hobby Japan's EC2 instances to enable an automatic and scalable response when access overload occurred. AWS Auto Scaling quickly stabilized their server operations. "Thanks to Auto Scaling, we did not have any trouble during our Summer animation broadcasting day in 2018 when many users accessed our server simultaneously," said Mr. Fukabori. Monthly incidents were reduced from 10 times per month to one or two times per month, allowing him to return to a more normal lifestyle.

The second improvement was the implementation of a visualization tool to allow Hobby Japan to check access status and resource utilization. And the third improvement was to reduce operational loads by introducing AWS operations management service.

But Hobby Japan still had another issue. ForgeVision's AWS operations and management services delivered systems failure notifications around the clock, but their team was only available to address issues between 10 AM and 6 PM on weekdays. Because website traffic often increased at night, Hobby Japan realized that they needed additional help to address this issue.

"I don't want to worry as much about the system or servers. If we could afford to, we would like to completely outsource the monitoring and management of our environment, but it would cost more," said Mr. Fukabori. "We produce high-quality content, but that work will be in vain if we cannot provide it at the right timing due to server downtime. Therefore, we need a system environment that is as automated as possible." ForgeVision suggested that Hobby Japan take a look at SIOS AppKeeper.

The Evaluation

Hobby Japan started using AppKeeper on the five websites they run. "We understood the functionality and didn't need to spend time on a special evaluation process. We started using it immediately," said Mr. Fukabori.

The Solution

SIOS AppKeeper is offered as a cloud software-as-a-service solution that supports the automatic monitoring and restoration of AWS EC2 services and instances. It monitors them via the AWS API and detects and recovers from failures quickly.

AppKeeper restores the application operation automatically by detecting and first restarting application services. This step typically restores services in seconds. If a restart of the service fails, it then restarts the entire instance. It issues a failure report that shows any failure occurrences and recoveries based on the relevant information obtained before and after the recovery from the virtual machine, services, and AWS.

If customers select the EC2 Auto Scaling functionality, they can easily add more instances for AppKeeper protection. AppKeeper will scale to monitor these new instances in near real-time and, if desired, apply designated settings automatically.

The Results

Since most failures can be resolved by restarting the instance or rebooting the service, SIOS AppKeeper quickly addresses these issues. It provides peace of mind even at night when IT people cannot address the failures. Mr. Fukabori decided to implement SIOS AppKeeper at Hobby Japan in April 2019, with the anticipation that the solution would add a new sense of security in the operations management.

SIOS AppKeeper hasn't encountered any issues that it could not automatically recover from, giving Mr, Fukabori and his team the reassurance of knowing that they had a fail-safe mechanism to automatically recover their systems if a failure occurred.

"Of course, human error can not be prevented, but the introduction of SIOS AppKeeper has been very good for my peace of mind," said Mr. Fukabori.

"I feel that we are one step closer to an environment where I can stay calm even when too many people are trying to access our popular content," he said. "The ability to enable a maintenance-free, care-free environment at low cost is the SIOS AppKeeper's advantage."

Learn more about SIOS AppKeeper

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