MTA successfully moves its emergency/weather website to the cloud

MTA increases functionality, resiliency, and service levels with Drupal, Acquia Cloud

Early in 2012, the MTA was facing a required upgrade of its website infrastructure. The increasing popularity of mta.info, its richer site content, and its growing importance to the MTA's ability to communicate with customers meant that significant infrastructure investments were needed to keep pace during normal, every-day traffic—but more importantly to handle the three-fold increase in traffic during emergency and severe weather events. Not knowing what public transportation services were running during an event like Superstorm Sandy could put personal safety at risk, especially for citizens of the NY Metropolitan region who are dependent on public transportation.

The MTA was also laboring under an inefficient, outdated publishing process, which required manually updating HTML and XML files along with managing tens of thousands of objects on the website file systems. The process was becoming an unsustainable, lengthy, laborious, and error-prone process. During an emergency/weather event, the MTA had to simplify its website to compensate for the increased user traffic, effectively turning a normally robust communications vehicle into the equivalent of a plain text page. This severely limited the agency's ability to provide effective tools to assist customers in navigating the MTA network when the value of providing information about the availability of service was crucial to public safety.

How they did it

To end its antiquated mode of content management, the MTA adopted Drupal as the foundation for a new website architecture. The MTA also decided to use Acquia Cloud to assure resiliency. Customer safety during emergencies dictated that the first project using Drupal on the cloud would be a specialized emergency/weather application; its goal: robust content management and delivery, enriched emergency focused features and workflow, combined with the ability to scale to tens of thousands of requests per second.

The MTA spent four weeks working with Acquia web architects to develop the foundation for the agency's Drupal sites: a data-feeds site; an emergency/weather notification site; and the normal mta.info site. Within four months, an application was developed that included a complementary innovative business

COMPANY INFORMATION

- ■ Metropolitan Transportation Authority
- ■ www.mta.info
- ■ alert.mta.info
- ■ Drupal user since 2012
- ■ Acquia client since 2012

THE NUMBERS

- ■ Accommodates 30,000 concurrent visitors
- ■ 100% availability during Superstorm Sandy

SUCCESS ENABLED WITH

- ■ Acquia Cloud

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process allowing real-time content delivery of service notifications and news to the new cloud-based site. Final development and load testing of the new site was completed just days before Superstorm Sandy hit.

The results

The importance and timeliness of this move to Drupal and Acquia Cloud cannot be overstated in terms of the MTA's ability to effectively communicate with customers, the public at large, and the media during Superstorm Sandy and its aftermath.

The MTA experienced several benefits from the move:

- Un-tethering alert.mta.info from any internal dependencies insulated it from the loss of those resources caused by Sandy, keeping it working reliably throughout the event.

- Dynamically expanding hardware and communications bandwidth during the storm in response to traffic spikes and ramping them down post-storm resulted in 100% uptime during and after the storm.

- Designing alert.mta.info for robust, resilient performance under duress allowed access to 30,000 customers per second with 99% of page loads in less than 4 seconds and an average load time of 2 seconds.

- Tapping into Acquia's developer resources from California and Australia when MTA lost access to internal development/support staff at the height of the storm resulted in uninterrupted performance of the website.

- Using Drupal's rich palette, Corporate Communications was able to more effectively communicate with the public, with a first-ever use of maps showing service disruptions as well as service restorations.

Once the constraints of bandwidth and scalability were lifted by the move to Drupal and Acquia Cloud, Corporate Communications was able to become fully engaged in providing effective web-based messaging to MTA customers, providing up-to-the-minute information, pictures, and service restoration maps. MTA was able to keep over 5.1 million customers informed before, during, and after Superstorm Sandy. Using open-source Drupal technology in tandem with Acquia Cloud services provided a cost-effective alternative to on premises proprietary solutions, while increasing functionality, resiliency, and service levels.

"As the public's interest in knowing the extent of [storm] damage grew, the range of information MTA was able to provide kept getting better and better. We kept adding maps, PDF downloads, status reports from the agencies, and photos."

*– Dan Queally,
Deputy Chief Information
Officer, MTA*

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- Contact info@acquia.com

- Or call 855.430.7700

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