

Featured Company

Always-On Data Center Monitoring

IT WatchDogs Lets You Stop Threats Before They Happen

by Bruce Gain

SOMEONE HAS INADVERTENTLY set the computer room thermostat to above 95 degrees Fahrenheit, while temperatures inside the servers surge to well over 120 degrees. As the servers continue to heat up, there is nobody on hand to shut them off on a Sunday. The meltdown continues until the SQL, Microsoft Exchange, and Web servers are effectively destroyed, along with all of the data on the hard drives inside.

The scenario sounds like a nightmare, but, unfortunately, it illustrates real risks data center managers face. However, heat surges are not the only environmental threats to a data center. Water sprinkler systems can suddenly activate, even when only traces of smoke are detected. Several inches of water could cover the data center's floor after a pipe breaks in the room next to the data center. Someone could open a rack cabinet and begin tampering with the server.

The bill to put your data center back to normal after the occurrence of any of these disasters could quickly add up to hundreds of thousands of dollars in server and software replacement costs and man hours in a small to midsized enterprise. However, these are examples of accidents that IT WatchDogs (512/257-1462; www.itwatchdogs.com) says should usually never happen in the first place—that is, after an adequate monitoring and alert system has been put in place.

With the use of IT WatchDogs' monitoring systems, data center managers can sleep better at night knowing that there are sensors in place that will trigger real-time alerts to a PC, BlackBerry, or smartphone before disasters can happen.

"It is like a hardware insurance policy—our devices protect equipment and give [data center managers] a cost-effective and less expensive way of doing that than our competitors," says Charlie Mayne, president of IT WatchDogs.

Always-On Monitoring

IT WatchDogs was founded in 2001 with the mission of offering technologies that will allow action to be taken before environmental threats can destroy equipment. Think of the firm's offerings as a means to closely monitor what goes on in your data center without having to be there.

IT WatchDogs' main product line is its Goose series of monitors. With the Goose series, sensor devices connect to the monitors by cable and are strategically placed around the data center. They can be used

to monitor heat, humidity, airflow, sound, temperature, electrical currents to equipment, and other environmental elements. For intrusion detection, sensors can be placed to detect if someone has entered the data center, turned on lights, or opened server cabinets.

A D-Link-enabled video camera works in conjunction with IT WatchDogs' Goose family monitors. The video cameras can be used to detect motion or to allow you to visually monitor what is going on in your data center on a LAN-connected PC or over a remote Internet connection.

"From the comfort of your browser, you can check the client monitor anywhere in the world," Mayne says.

The devices are designed to send alerts before things go wrong in the data center. You set the monitors to alert you by email, for example, if server racks are opened, humidity has risen past a certain point, or an electrical current has increased past a given threshold. The idea is to set the Goose system so that you are alerted well before any damage can occur. "You get an email telling you that temperatures have risen so that you can do something about it before the temperatures get to a certain point," Mayne says.

Save Time & Money

Although IT WatchDogs is not the only vendor out there that offers monitoring devices and systems, the firm says that its systems work well, are easy to set up, and beat the competition in price.



Featured IT WatchDogs Products

Product	Description	Price
WeatherDuck	Attaches to a PC serial port and is geared for server room or remote computer room monitoring. Internal sensors can monitor temperature, humidity, airflow, light level, motion, and sound for smoke alarm detection.	\$199
MiniGoose	A smaller version of the flagship WeatherGoose with the same features but only one internal temperature sensor. It supports up to 16 remote sensors that are sold separately.	\$199
MiniGoose 2	An expanded MiniGoose with 16 external sensor jacks and three I/O ports in a rack mount. It is geared for cabinet monitoring applications and has an internal temperature sensor.	\$299
WeatherGoose	Operates as an internal Web server with no supporting PC or client software required and offers internal sensors for temperature, humidity, airflow, light levels, and sound levels. One unit can monitor 16 remote sensors.	\$399
SuperGoose Climate Monitor	Includes all the features that the WeatherGoose offers plus a built-in LCD for onsite monitoring, an audio alarm that a sensor can trigger, and a built-in rack plate.	\$499
PowerGoose	Offers environmental and power monitoring in a 1U space. It offers all the features of a WeatherGoose plus power monitoring of current, voltage, and watts.	\$569 (15-amp), \$579 (20-amp)

SOURCE: IT WATCHDOGS

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IT WatchDogs
(512) 257-1462
www.itwatchdogs.com

- IT WatchDogs' monitors alert you of potentially disastrous environmental conditions.
- Various iterations monitor temperature, humidity, airflow, motion, smoke, and more.
- "It is like a hardware insurance policy—our devices protect equipment and give [data center managers] a cost-effective and less expensive way of doing that than our competitors," says IT WatchDogs' Charlie Mayne.

IT WatchDogs' WxGoos-1, for example, offers temperature, humidity, airflow, audio, and light monitoring and tracking with support for up to 19 external sensors for \$399. This price point for the application is roughly half that of the competition, says Pepe Ramos, operations and sales manager for IT WatchDogs.

After the sensors are placed where you need them and are then connected to the device, the Goose monitoring system needs only to be plugged into an electrical outlet and connected to a LAN to get up and running, which can be done in a matter of minutes. Once activated, it will transmit data over a LAN or Internet connection that can be accessed with a Web browser. Depending on which of the Goose devices you use, the Web page might show a video of your data center or temperature, humidity, or any of the other readings the sensors can detect.

Of course, some users could have questions during the setup process, whether it might involve setting a static IP address for the monitor, getting a firmware upgrade, or placing sensors. To that end, Mayne says the firm makes it a point to offer tech support that you can use.

"When you call in, we don't have a support center/call center kind of thing. If you need technical support to install or troubleshoot our products, you call in and you can immediately talk to someone that actually probably wrote the software for the product," Mayne says. "You are not talking to somebody who is trying to diagnose your problem by following a flow chart."

New Developments

The detection and tracking of simple fluctuation patterns in temperature, electrical usage, and other parameters are becoming increasingly important for data center management. In order to keep track of all these factors in a single easy-to-use format, IT WatchDogs has enabled data to be aggregated and then saved in a spreadsheet file with its Goose systems. But for better data tracking, the firm says it has recently developed an interface that allows data to be stored and used in an SQL database.

"We used to keep the data stored in a console in a proprietary format, but now we are releasing a product that will allow you to aggregate, log, and store all data in a SQL database format," Mayne says.

Eventually, IT WatchDogs' sensors will likely go wireless, although the company has not set a date for when that application might be launched. "I think one day you will see a more wireless environment with sensors put anywhere," Ramos says. ■