Forbes INSIGHTS

HARNESSING NETWORK EFFECTS

HOW SPLUNK HELPS SUPERCHARGE THE EFFICIENCY AND SECURITY OF COLLABORATIVE NETWORKS

As access and collaboration expand beyond functional and even organizational boundaries, the value of data grows exponentially. Contributing to this increase, network effects are the scale economies that accrue when an ever-widening swath of users begin collaborating on the same or compatible platforms.

SHARED LEARNING

Even machines can become providers of data and hence contribute to network effects. Consider the Internet of Things (IoT). "Machines like to talk," says Mark Itzkowitz, director of product marketing at Splunk, a provider of solutions for mining machine-generated and other key sources of data. But more importantly, he continues, "we like to listen." Why? Because IoT-connected machines provide data that can feed an array of benefits, especially if shared with a network.

Today's soda dispensers, for example, vend a range of products mixed by individuals according to their preferences. Splunk works with Coca-Cola's Freestyle machines to mine this data. "Resulting data streams are of great value to various functions of the soft drink provider itself, such as sales insight for Marketing, cash balances for finance or new flavor ideas for product development," says Itzkowitz. But this same information can be invaluable to other groups as well, such as movie theaters or restaurants (for inventory control, pricing or location feedback) or local distributors (for restocking or maintaining the dispenser).

The more these entities and functions share, the more they need to adopt collaborative tools, such as enterprise file sync and share (EFSS), to gain insights that will improve efficiency, foster innovation and drive performance.

ENHANCING NETWORK EFFICIENCY

Companies can benefit by enabling and promoting tools that allow for all the above and more, making the network more aware of their existence and capa-bilities. One way of doing so is closely monitoring collaboration to identify trends and opportunities of value to the network. As Itzkowitz explains, "An effective [EFSS] solution gives you information about how it is being used. Where is everything stored? Who did the posting? When and how many times is it shared?"

Now, using a machine data overlay, such as those provided by Splunk, Itzkowitz says, "a company can collect, fold, spindle and process this core information to gain insight into how to improve key network attributes like efficiency and security."

To drive effectiveness, for example, overseers can identify insights such as:

- Who shares the most?
- What documents or folders are proving most popular to others?
- Where are the bottlenecks?
- What potentially worthwhile data is not being used?
- What else might be made available?

Armed with these insights, conveniently and clearly organized on dashboards, companies can take appropriate actions to further stimulate adoption and usage. For example, the firm can now identify and promote the most valuable sources, documents and authors. It might then take steps such as encouraging the most popular or useful authors to contribute more. Companies can also promote adoption and improvement by writing newsletters that profile successes, super-users or trending content. Overall, says Itzkowitz, "an organization can now see what is and isn't working and can refine its collaborative efforts across the network."

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>
> — **Mark Itzkowitz**
> Director of Product Marketing, Splunk

STRONG NETWORKS CAN LEAD TO STRONG SECURITY

The more broadly an EFSS solution is adopted, the easier it becomes to add governance. A sound core system sets ground rules, such as who can publish or who can view which sets of data. Then, by adding an overlay, overseers can see what is popular, and can also identify patterns that may not be appropriate.

Certainly, to achieve the maximum value from network effects, data must be shared by a wide range of users both within and, where prudent, beyond the enterprise. The wider this net, the greater the potential for security issues. But, as Itzkowitz explains, "a sound [overlay] allows a company to develop alerts to potential problems, with the form and timing of alerts customized according to needs and usage patterns."

For example, a spike in activity can indicate a security problem. But it is important to identify the form of activity to better understand the true risk. Consider an instance of multiple login attempts. If it's a single user making multiple login attempts, the root causeis likely a forgotten password—a low-risk event. Alternatively, multiple login attempts from multiple devices emanating from multiple regions is the signature of a likely attack. A sound overlay "alerts the IT team, greatly improving network security," says Itzkowitz.

Also worth noting, adds Itzkowitz, are the security-enhancing attributes of today's cloud-based platforms. "In the old days of security, your data was like cash," he explains. "Once someone steals your laptop or thumb drive, it's theirs. You can't get it back." By comparison, a cloud environment is more like a credit card. "As soon as a breach is detected, you can turn off the flow of data."

Another key aspect of network security is the importance of monitoring those in charge of data security. "A surprisingly large number of security breaches are internal," says Itzkowitz, driven either by failure to follow security policies or by users actively committing crimes. Accordingly, a firm must not only observe end-users, but must also "watch the watchers." Here again, a good overlay provides key data for monitoring and alerting the organization to events and usage patterns. This way, organizations can identify potential data risks before they become leakage events.

DRIVING ADOPTION, EFFICIENCY AND SECURITY

IoT and EFSS provide strong examples of how network effects—data shared across internal functions and even the external value chain—can improve performance. So long as the form of collaboration is efficient and secure, value for the participating enterprise increases. Organizations should indeed pursue broader collaborative networking, but doing so efficiently and securely, says Itzkowitz, "requires an informed and disciplined approach."

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