

# WhatsUp Gold Spotlight on



**James R. Mercer**  
Director of IT, Flexi-Van Leasing Inc.

Back in 2002, only a few IT departments outside of the largest enterprises had even considered implementing proactive, real-time network monitoring – or anything close to it. Help desks were accustomed to learning about problems from users, who grudgingly put up with the disruptions of unplanned network downtime.

That same year James R. Mercer, currently Director of IT, Flexi-Van Leasing Inc., first became a customer of WhatsUp Gold.

At the time, Mercer had begun to work for the Hudson Valley Federal Credit Union in New York State as its Director of Information Technologies.

*“With \$2B in assets, The Hudson CU network had no network management, no tools to look at the health of the network, no reports of historical trends, and no alerts to warn IT of problems,”* remarks Mercer. *“I knew I had to take action to clean up the network right away.”*

From previous jobs Mercer was familiar with Tivoli and OpenView, but he decided to search for alternatives online and discovered WhatsUp Gold.

*“I thought the price was too low for it to be any good. But the download was free so I got it.”*

On the initial discovery scan Mercer was impressed when WhatsUp Gold picked up nearly all the equipment and identified it. *“I’d seen enterprise software that didn’t do that too well.”* Then he added SNMP credentials and re-scanned. This time WhatsUp Gold reported all the details right down to the switches. He had found his network monitoring solution.

## The Advantages of WhatsUp Gold’s Flexibility

In using WhatsUp Gold at Hudson, Mercer developed a number of unique custom counters and active monitors, giving him a good sense of the product’s capabilities. He continues to draw on the flexibility of WhatsUp Gold to create custom monitors and considers this capability one of the product’s biggest advantages.

*“WhatsUp Gold does almost everything you want it to do out of the box, and with a little work you can get it to monitor virtually anything else.”*

WhatsUp Gold’s easy customization and ability to support

nearly any device is a feature Mercer continues to use frequently, even today. For example, NetApp for SANS publishes an OID table, but NetApp doesn’t provide a persistent, background monitoring tool that takes advantage of it. So Mercer monitors the table using WhatsUp Gold.

Mercer can create an active monitor for something sophisticated in about 10 minutes using simple measurements including flag yes/no, threshold above/below and rate of change (e.g., temperature monitor). *“It just takes a little work and a little testing.”*

In 2006, Mercer joined PSCH Inc., one of New York’s largest non-profit health services organizations. There he once again encountered an IT organization waiting for things to break before they got fixed.

Initially hired on a project basis, Mercer was soon made VP of Information Technologies.

At PSCH, WhatsUp Gold’s low entry price point and icon interface impressed the IT technology management team; and within two months the company was *“monitoring the world 24x7.”*

## WhatsUp Gold Provides a 24x7 Network Ops Center – at a Lower Cost

Mercer’s appreciation of WhatsUp Gold continued to grow. *“WhatsUp Gold is like having a 24x7 NOC, watching everything that happens. And it costs less than \$10K.”*

Experience taught him that the false positives often reported initially by WhatsUp Gold weren’t product flaws but in fact indicated a network problem, such as overloaded equipment.

*“When you start to investigate false positives, you find the problem -- the faulty wire, the loop, the overload on equipment etc. – that prevented the device from responding to WhatsUp Gold’s poll. Over time you use WhatsUp Gold to improve your network, and the false positives disappear. Once that happens, you really pay attention when WhatsUp Gold alerts you that something’s wrong.”*

The next test of WhatsUp Gold came when Mercer became Director of Global Information Technologies at Five Star Products, a mature 50 year-old company. There he used WhatsUp Gold to help update the company’s IT infrastructure so it could sustain a 20% annual organic growth rate for five years.

## Flexi-Van: Another IT Group Becomes Pro-active

Arriving at Flexi-Van in 2010 as its Director of IT, Mercer took on responsibility for a team of 12. When he asked his team how they managed the network, they replied they knew there was a problem when a customer called. They were running their network on the free version of Solaris.

By now it was a familiar story to Mercer, and he knew exactly how to jump start network improvements.

At first the Flexi-Van team was skeptical of WhatsUp Gold, so Mercer took an evangelical stance and did the installation and configuration himself. "Even a non-propeller head can bring up WhatsUp Gold."

When Mercer pointed out some out-of-range ping times reported by WhatsUp Gold, his staff maintained there weren't any problems. Knowing better, Mercer investigated and found switch problems, loops, wiring issues and other weak points just waiting to break the network.

At that point, training his staff to work with WhatsUp Gold began. In less than one year Mercer's team did a rip and replace of the entire infrastructure: servers, O/S (to VMware), and new Brocade switches. They now use Brocade sFlow to provide in-depth monitoring of network traffic through WhatsUp Gold's Flow Manager.

On the new network with WhatsUp Gold, uptime is 99.999%.

## Ipswitch Makes Mercer's Vendor Short List

Mercer looks for value, performance and consistency in a vendor – and he pushes the envelope. Ipswitch makes his short list with only a handful of others.

Of the WhatsUp Gold support team, Mercer praises them as "consistently wonderful." When he calls, his question is dealt with immediately. He also finds the WhatsUp Gold team very open to making product enhancements at his request.

## IT as a Driver of Enterprise Profitability

Mercer holds a strategic view of the role of IT to drive profitability in the enterprise. One of his main strengths is to "elevate under-performing IT departments to deliver service excellence by changing focus from silos and technology-driven to customer-focused and business-driven."

The shift from technology-driven to business-driven IT positively influences the customers who ultimately determine profitability. "The customer base sees a shift and is reassured that you are aware of problems, you are aware of status, and you are actively working to correct problems – this matters for both internal and external customers."

With WhatsUp Gold as his network monitoring ally, Mercer can carry out his mission of revitalizing IT departments and transforming IT into a strategic business partner faster and with less cost.

"It's hard for WhatsUp Gold to disappoint. It really does everything."

## Other uses of WhatsUp Gold at Flexi-Van

The WhatsConfigured plug-in gives Mercer a way to track configurations on all network devices. When he's notified of changes that bypassed IT's change management procedures, he has a backup. In addition, Mercer and his team get alerts when a configuration changes between backups, providing insight into unexpected or unauthorized changes to network equipment configurations.

The WhatsConnected plug-in provides Mercer and his team with an easily updated physical view of the network. It allows him to quickly determine or re-verify what's connected to

his switches based on IP address or MAX address, a very useful administrative support capability.

The WhatsUp Gold Flow Manager plugin provides protocol and utilization analysis to support aggregate performance analysis so that WhatsUp Gold can monitor servers with dual trunked ports. Mercer and his staff now have historical data regarding overall networking trends, and have found (and corrected) peripherals utilizing unneeded and unwanted network protocols. From a security perspective, the threshold alerts available from Flow Manager advise Mercer and his staff of unusual or sustained network traffic.

## Today Flexi-Van relies on WhatsUp Gold to monitor:

- Overall network performance
- Email delivery
- Exchange Servers (a known memory leak in their version of Exchange would cause servers to stop operating, but now a threshold set in WhatsUp Gold alerts them of pending problems, averting server crashes)
- Unstable Windows processes are now monitored so they can be restarted on notification
- The performance of big data flows to disk through EDI is now acceptable thanks to the diagnostics in WhatsUp Gold; it used to be extremely slow

About The Network Management Division of Ipswitch, Inc.

The Network Management Division of Ipswitch, Inc. is the developer of the WhatsUp Gold suite of innovative IT Management software. Over 100,000 networks worldwide — in small, medium and enterprise businesses — use WhatsUp Gold to assure the availability, health and security of their critical business infrastructure. WhatsUp Gold was named the 2012 Network Management Product of the Year by Networking Computing. To learn more about WhatsUp Gold or download a free trial, please visit: [www.whatsupgold.com/products/download](http://www.whatsupgold.com/products/download)

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