A Proactive Approach to Data-driven Observability

Case Study

Easy-to-Use, Scalable Monitoring with Minimal Maintenance

About Vistar Media

Vistar Media provides a first-of-its-kind programmatic platform for the digital out-of-home advertising industry. Vistar Media’s bidding exchange enables media buyers and media owners to transact across guaranteed and non-guaranteed inventory in real time. With an inventory that includes 12 billion monthly impressions, Vistar Media empowers digital out-of-home marketers to build targeted, data-driven campaigns across a range of industries.

Need: Avoid Increasing Monitoring Overhead

Vistar Media was building a real-time bidding exchange for digital out-of-home ads by providing the analytics and the infrastructure for the ecosystem. “We not only facilitate the buys, but we also act as an ad server for the network and advertisers who put in their server requirements. It is very similar to the large online ad servers,” stated Mark Chadwick. In order to provide this real-time service, Vistar Media had to be able to monitor and analyze a wide range of data points for the many media companies in their ad exchange.

“At the end of the day, we are not running a metrics business over here so if I can get the monitoring out of my hands, I’m happy.”

Mark Chadwick, CIO & Co-Founder, Vistar Media

Key Results

Time to Value

Vistar Media was able to immediately integrate Datadog with their existing tech stack.

Reduced Overhead

Datadog provides Vistar Media with a real-time view of their partner networks’ ad servers, eliminating communication overhead.
Challenge

Vistar Media needed a powerful way to monitor its real-time service as its infrastructure grew, but they didn't want to spend time managing their own monitoring solution. They needed a scalable, low-overhead solution that would integrate with their existing services and databases, such as Python, StatsD, Amazon EC2, and Amazon S3, allowing their teams to focus on serving clients.

Why Datadog?

Datadog’s unified solution provided Vistar Media with a scalable way to monitor their metrics, allowing them to quickly identify problems and reduce their mean time to resolution (MTTR). The engineering team was able to get immediate insight into their existing tech stack with turn-key integrations and create custom dashboards to gain visibility into the health of individual client systems.

“Out-of-the-Box, Low-Maintenance Monitoring”

During his quest to outsource his monitoring needs, a key priority of Chadwick’s was to find an “out-of-the-box” metrics solution that would integrate easily with Vistar’s current systems. Chadwick became aware of Datadog when a tweet from Alex Payne, the ex-Platform Lead at Twitter, mentioned to “check Datadog out.” Chadwick found that Datadog included the integrations that he needed to get Vistar’s monitoring solution up quickly. Additionally, Chadwick liked Datadog’s ability to perform customized metric monitoring, log critical events, and scale easily. “I had scaled up open-source monitoring solutions once before, and it wasn’t fun. So when I had the opportunity to do it again, I said ‘No.’” said Chadwick.

Eliminating Unnecessary and Time-Consuming “Back and Forth”

“In terms of time, on a daily basis, Datadog eliminates a lot of the back and forth with the media owners to find out what is going on,” according to Chadwick. “It is just a good visual tool for seeing the activity from each of the content management systems that we work with,” according to Ciara Kennedy, SVP, Product at Vistar Media. “It is an easy way to go in and get a feel of what is going on.” Without Datadog, Vistar Media would have to repeatedly reach out to each media owner to see if they were sending any requests that day.

“A Tool to Monitor Customized Metrics on a Daily Basis”

As Vistar Media moved toward a real-time system, it was important to understand whether their partner networks had reported all of their ads in a short period of time. Vistar Media now uses Datadog as a daily monitoring tool to get a feel for what networks are actively sending requests to their servers, what live campaigns are running smoothly, and whether the right networks are requesting ads. “I always have Datadog up on a daily basis to debug issues with integrations or just to make sure that live campaigns are running smoothly,” said Kennedy. By using Datadog to create customized graphs, Datadog became
Vistar’s window into how each partner network was performing. “Each network that we work with has different requirements. In terms of connectivity of their networks, we are always dealing with different frequencies and rates of requests each day,” said Kennedy. Some of Vistar Media’s partners operate on a real-time basis, while other networks request a full day’s worth of ads in advance. The wide diversity in partners has made customization key since the monitoring needs for each partner varies drastically. “There are days where we see weird trends of requests coming in,” stated Kennedy. Vistar is able to use Datadog’s custom graphs to catch the anomalies or concern areas in their system on a real-time basis.

Fixing Issues Before They Become Noticeable

Going forward, Vistar Media is looking to create separate dashboards for each ad network that they work with. This will enable Vistar Media to “gain more detailed metrics for each individual media owner,” stated Kennedy. The Vistar Media team will be able to take these detailed metrics and use them to quickly identify potential problem areas, improving Vistar Media’s ability to solve problems as soon as they are detected.