

Sliding Mind Introduces TrackPath: Comprehensive Monitoring and Diagnostics for the Desktop

Abstract

On October 26, 2011, Sliding Mind (<http://www.slidingmind.com>) a subsidiary of Original Software (<http://www.origsoft.com/>) introduced TrackPath, a new product line for monitoring enterprise applications from the perspective of the desktop. Known for Application Quality Management (AQM) and testing across the pre-deployment application lifecycle, this is a new venture for Original Software and one that addresses a market with relatively few competing solutions.

This ENTERPRISE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES® (EMA™) Impact Brief provides the details of this news against a backdrop of Sliding Mind's parent company and its history in the marketplace. It also discusses desktop monitoring in context to current industry trends. EMA sees this announcement as a welcome addition to the End User Experience (EUE) marketplace. It is an innovative solution from a stable, experienced company with deep and broad application lifecycle knowledge.

Event

On October 26, 2011, Sliding Mind, a subsidiary of Original Software, introduced TrackPath, a new product line for monitoring applications and desktops with a low-impact, lightweight desktop agent. Launched as a separate brand to Original Software's pre-release planning and software delivery line (see Figure 1), TrackPath extends the company's reach from pre-deployment through to production monitoring.

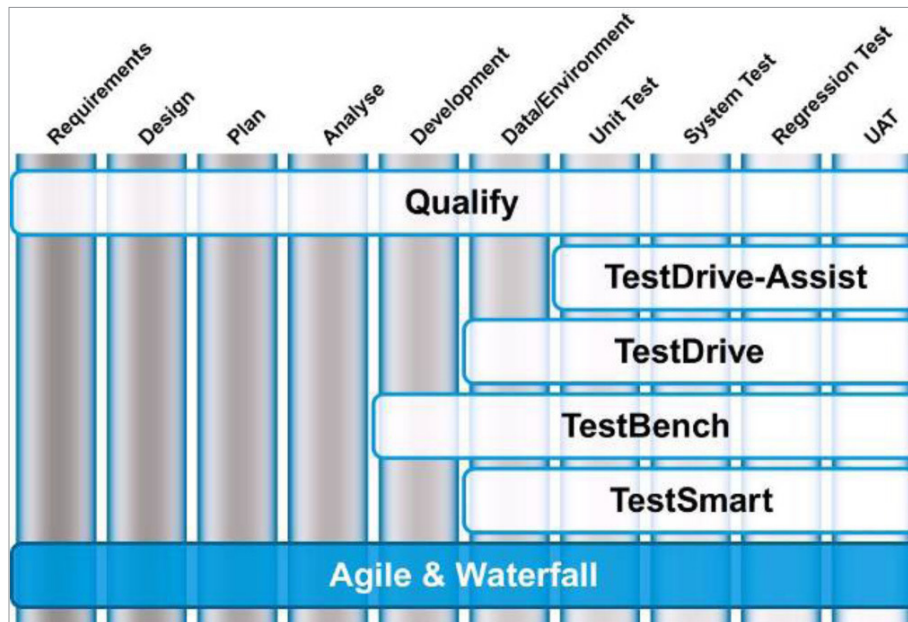


Figure 1: Original Software Testing Products

The new brand addresses a different constituency from Original Software's traditional customers, but is a logical extension of a product line that already incorporates a variety of testing solutions and scenarios. It also introduces DevOps-focused capabilities to Original Software customers.

The company's awareness of the challenges of supporting today's applications was the genesis for the new solution, and Original Software's overall messaging has always been around determining "what went wrong and why." TrackPath extends this message to production monitoring.

Context and Background

Original Software was founded in the U.K. in 1997. Its initial business model focused on Application Quality Management testing, including back-end testing, patch testing, and database monitoring for the IBM iSeries. With roots in the midrange space, Original Software continued to enhance the line over time with a variety of capabilities and a user interface that "makes it work the way we'd like it to." The company opened its first U.S. office in 2000, and today the software line covers virtually "any" platform.

One key differentiator is Original Software's focus on creating tools that deliver almost immediate business value and fast Return on Investment (ROI). By automating the test data management process, for example, Original Software enables development and testing teams to roll back changes to testing databases after each test—versus manually rebuilding test databases. Script reuse adds to the time savings as well, as does the ability to test multiple scenarios quickly and easily. For example, if one input field has three possible values, it is easy to test. However, if there are twenty fields, each with three possible values, testing all possible permutations and scenarios becomes very complex very quickly.

TrackPath

With a broad range of experience in the AQM and testing spaces, moving into production monitoring is a natural evolution. The intended constituencies for the new brand include personnel supporting end users running applications from their desktops. Help Desk, Operations, and Application Support personnel are examples of potential target groups.

TrackPath is a recorder that runs constantly on the PC, monitoring keystrokes, screens visited, Memory/CPU, application error logs, and similar metrics. It creates a complete audit log of every keystroke, and a "snapshot" is created for each meaningful user action (see Figure 2). Each event is time stamped, so performance issues are recorded in context to other keystrokes, as well as to the time frame of the entire keying sequence.

Addressing applications that the user interacts with regardless of where they are hosted (cloud or on-premise), TrackPath is typically set to store user actions for a half-hour, although the duration can be set to accommodate company policies. The product proactively prompts when it detects an error and, in addition, users can manually send an error message to the Help Desk by clicking a button on the desktop. Messages can be sent in a variety of policy-based formats (email, etc.)

TrackPath stores and displays every action in the "TrackBar" (see Figure 3), a panel displayed on the left side of the screen. It is fully self-documenting. This means that not only is each problem immediately visible to support personnel, every action leading up to it is visible as well (see Figure 2).

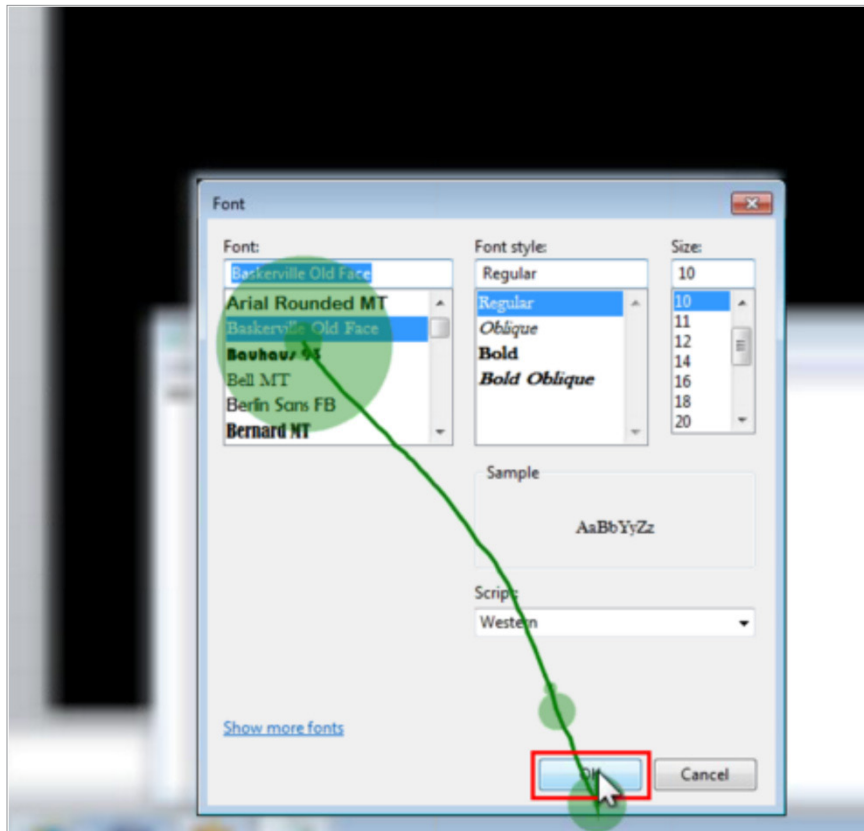


Figure 2: Snapshot of desktop "event"

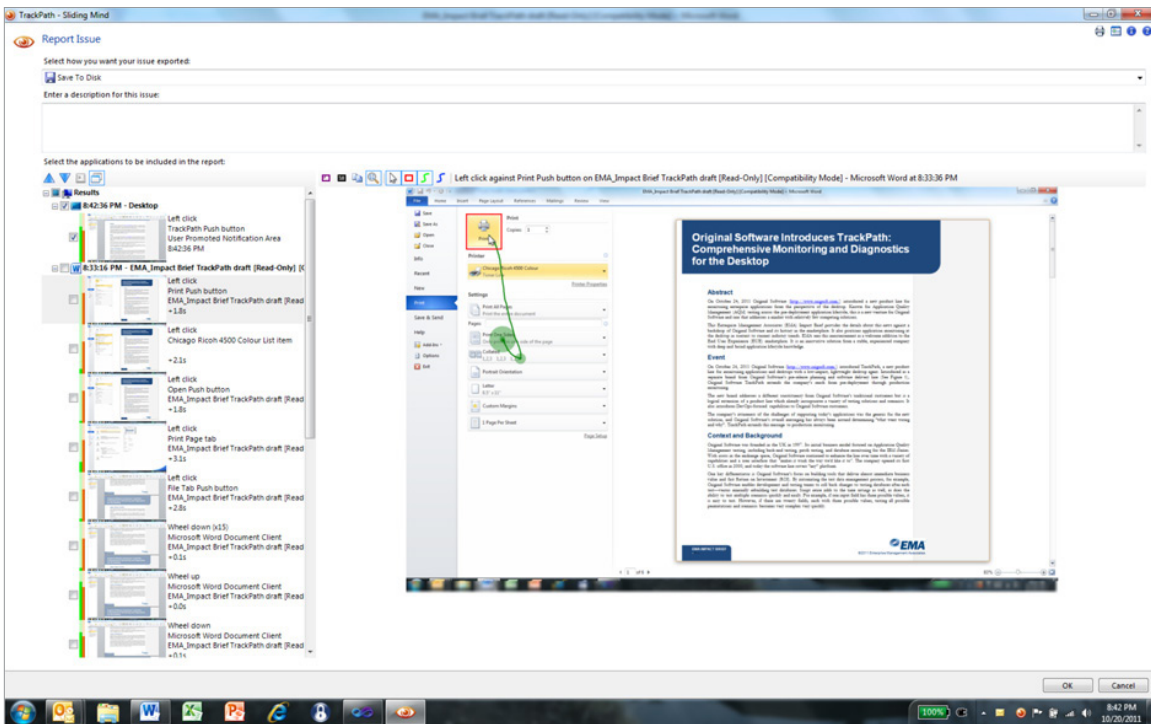


Figure 3: Timeline of events is tracked in left hand panel

For companies concerned with confidentiality of data handled by particular user groups, such as Payroll teams, TrackPath also has the ability to obscure sensitive data (see Figure 4). Customers can specify how much information is provided to support personnel, and the amount of detail displayed can be specified by application.

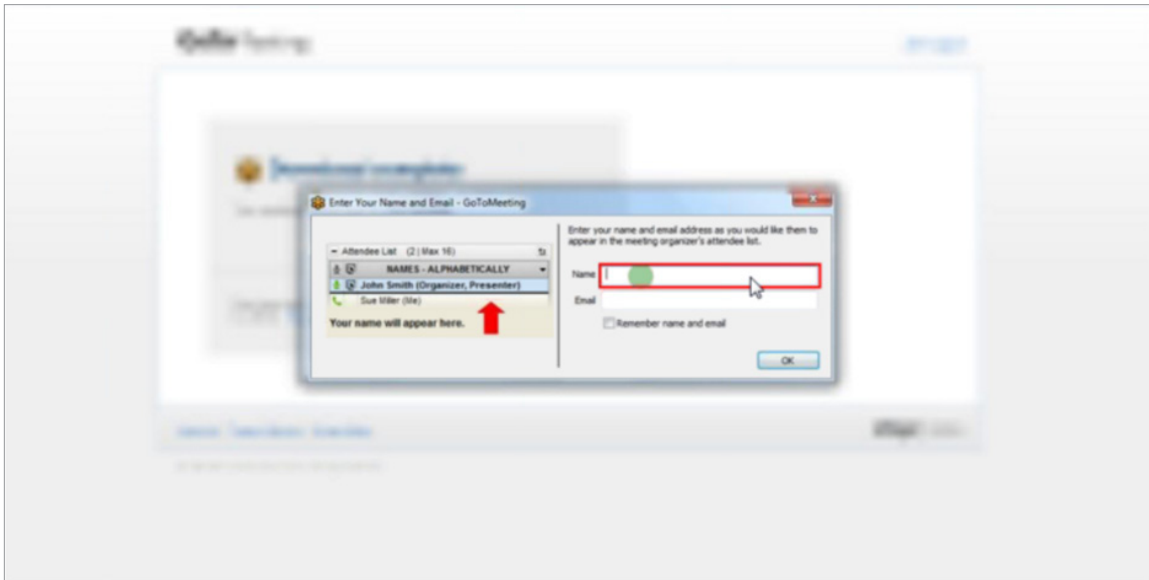


Figure 4: Sensitive data can be obscured

In addition to providing an innovative way to monitor applications in production, TrackPath offers a unique, ongoing usability testing capability that can be very valuable during product rollout. With the concerns every company has about rolling out new Windows software, for example, TrackPath can be a very effective way to track the effectiveness of user training and the stability of the software itself. It can also reduce the time Help Desk personnel spend on the troubleshooting aspects of user support.

Key Differentiators and Value Proposition

- *Depth of application-related expertise on the part of the vendor:* Original Software has been creating software for developers and QA testers for almost 15 years. This experience contributes significantly to the company's overall credibility and strength in the application monitoring space.
- *Patented technology:* TrackPath not only records desktop actions, but delivers the results of the recording in a unique visual interface.
- *Applicability to internal and/or outsourced Help Desks and support groups.*
- *Scalable to even the largest companies:* The software runs on the PC and recorded information is stored locally on the hard disk. For companies with widely distributed users, this architecture means that the product is highly scalable and there is no need to maintain a central server.
- *Simplicity:* Simplicity and ease of deployment deliver immediate business value and fast Return on Investment.
- *Self-documenting:* TrackPath provides a complete audit trail for every user.
- *Automatic notification:* The product automatically notifies support teams when an error occurs. For "soft errors," the user clicks a single button to send an email to support personnel.
- *Secure:* Multiple security features ensure that sensitive data is obscured and protected.

EMA Perspective

Although not marketed as an End User Experience (EUE) solution, TrackPath incorporates the key aspects of desktop-focused EUE. Such products are coming into their own as public cloud consumption increases, as this is currently one of the best ways to monitor cloud performance. EMA's latest research bears out the fact that IT organizations recognize this, and EMA sees adoption of EUE solutions escalating throughout the next two to five years.

TrackPath is marketed as an application monitoring solution; however, it can potentially be used for a wide variety of similar tasks that require specialized, desktop-facing instrumentation. TrackPath can also be used to assess software usability, for example, or to track user actions for governance and compliance-related purposes.

Although it has had a North American presence for more than ten years, Original Software has stayed under the radar compared to its larger competitors. One main reason why is because it has relied primarily on viral marketing, employing tools such as Twitter and other social media to introduce “buzz worthy” news to the marketplace. Since the time appears to be right for desktop monitoring capabilities such as those delivered by TrackPath, the company is well advised to step up marketing to take advantage of this tide.

It is also noteworthy that while the company is moving into an area in which relatively few products play, the competition is still fierce. Knoa and Aternity are the best-known solutions in the desktop EUE space, and both are also strong products. EMA sees desktop monitoring solutions as essential to today's IT toolkits, and specific use cases for this technology will likely multiply as these tools are deployed more widely.

EMA analysts particularly like the intuitiveness of the user interface, which graphically displays each screen visited and records each important “event,” mouse click, and field entry. It is also notable that a seasoned, experienced company, such as Original Software, is branching out into a new product space versus simply maintaining the status quo, product-wise. Using the Sliding Mind subsidiary company to launch a related yet different product also makes sense.

EMA sees this announcement as a welcome addition to the EUE marketplace. For potential buyers, this is an innovative solution from a stable, experienced company with deep and broad application lifecycle knowledge.

About EMA

Founded in 1996, Enterprise Management Associates (EMA) is a leading industry analyst firm that provides deep insight across the full spectrum of IT and data management technologies. EMA analysts leverage a unique combination of practical experience, insight into industry best practices, and in-depth knowledge of current and planned vendor solutions to help its clients achieve their goals. Learn more about EMA research, analysis, and consulting services for enterprise line of business users, IT professionals and IT vendors at www.enterprisemanagement.com or blogs.enterprisemanagement.com. You can also follow EMA on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).

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