

REVIEW: Alemba

Proactive Problem Management Review

By Rebecca Beach

vFire has provided strong proactive problem management functionality without becoming too complicated and will appeal to those who like their tools to have that databasey look and feel.

Alemba have understood that proactive problem management is a useful and valuable process and not just somewhere to plonk all those annoying event alerts that come in. One of my favourite capabilities of vFire is the ability to set outages and use these in conjunction with rules to stop alerts being received at all. With the typical issue being that serious issues are missed due to over alerting I find this both refreshing and immensely useful and know a few people who would rip their arm off for this kind of functionality within a tool.

Additional useful functions include the ability to simulate outages to show what kind of impact to the business could be expected in the event of a outage and the one-click 'Find Causes' facility which shows all items and services that could be the cause of a failure. Both of these provide powerful automation and I imagine that current customers of the solution wonder how they ever managed without.

My impression of the solution is that it would be suitable for medium to large enterprise organisations of all levels of proactive problem management maturity.

General

User configuration possible for:

Forms	Tables	Workflows	Dashboards
✓	✓	✓	✓

- Drag and drop workflow design
- User defined dashboards
- 188 out of the box reports available
- Existing standard integrations with monitoring tools such as SAM and SCOM
- Default forms and structure as basic starting point
- Known errors and outages displayed on customer portal bulletin board
- Easy linkage between Problems and other types of tickets (i.e. Incident)
- Proactive solution suggestion as record details inputted
- Implementation support available

Identification

vFire defines the difference between a reactive and proactive problem management record as:

- Reactive – the manual creation of a problem record through a call or request being logged.
- Proactive – the automatic creation, assignment and notification of a problem, created from either a defined criteria set and pattern recognition or generated from an external source if a problem is identified.

The Proactive Problem Management Module is underpinned by the Entity Based Relationship Model which creates on-the-fly custom queries via a dynamic sql query engine. This is polled by the Proactive Analysis service on a schedule configured as part of the analyse rule.



Executive Summary

• Elevator Pitch

vFire 9.1 is a strong and uncomplicated proactive problem management solution. The solution provides advanced capabilities allowing customers to take advantage of many automated features to make problem management less painful.

+ Strengths

- 'Find causes' functionality takes a good portion of the leg work out of troubleshooting
- Ability to simulate an outage to show possible impact to business
- Good visual display of CMDB showing related items and services

- Weaknesses

- While the dashboards are easy to create and contain a good choice of information they are not the best looking

🏠 Primary Market Focus

Based on the information provided, vFire 9.1 is primarily a large-market solution

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Proactive problems are identified on pre-defined, pattern based modelling via a simple wizard based interface. A rule to monitor either calls or requests can be automatically created when a criteria set is matched.

Criteria can include:

- existing or new data
- specific counts or percentage thresholds
- attributes from calls, workflow, availability, CMDB and SLM

Selection Criteria can be as simple or complex as per business requirements using Boolean logic.

Any output from the proactive problem management module falls under the calls or workflow modules. This allows all functionality and usability of the calls and workflow modules available to entities created via the proactive problem management module, but can still be identified as an automatically generated problem and linked to entities that caused the problem's creation



Assessment and Alerting

vFire calculates an objective risk assessment of the proactive problem by graphically displaying the CMDB architecture showing the linked CI and all affected, or partially affected CI's and services allowing investigation by users and enabling problem managers to gauge the extent of the problem, the risk it poses and what immediate and medium term actions are required.

I was impressed that vFire goes a step further than some of the other visual assessment aids featured in this review by providing visibility of the end-to-end relationship of CIs and Services ensuring that the holistic impact of current outages can be viewed. The same mechanisms can also be used to simulate the impact if a planned outage is scheduled.

vFire is able to alert relevant users and resolver groups to a proactive problem at any point in the Problem Lifecycle, (create/edit, resolve, close) via the configuration of rules within the solution with similar mechanisms in place to manually add/remove users or groups at any point in the problem lifecycle.

Implementation

vFire provides the ability to link records to each other with one click. The solution enables the parent record to cascade updates such as status changes to all linked child records.

Attachments can be added to Problem records and stored as a linked object of the Problem record. There is no limitation to the attachment file type.

The status, or any attribute of a Problem can be set when it is initially logged and then falls under standard calls functionality where call status (e.g. open, in progress, resolved, closed) can be selected at any point in the Problem's lifecycle.

Availability of CIs and Services associated with a Problem record can have their availability tracked. This includes any scheduled downtime, the targeted availability of the CI or Service, any planned or unplanned outages and the overall performance of the CI or Service against targeted metrics. Failure management is essential for any reliable operation and I believe that vFire have provided good capabilities for doing so.

Commercial Summary

Product

vFire 9.1

Version reviewed

V9.1

Date of version release

2011

Year founded

2007

Customers

350

Pricing Structure

Currently vFire is sold as a perpetual licence for concurrent and dedicated agent users, the customer interface is supplied as an unlimited licence.

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Auditing and Accountability

vFire has a number of escalation levels prior to a SLA breach occurring. These are displayed graphically on the call, i.e. red for breach, and on each escalation and recipients can be configured to receive a breach notification. Recipients can be a user, a group or another stakeholder.

The solution contains the ability to suggest Knowledge Base articles and Known Error information that may relate to a proactive problem record via the Service Window which is available in all call windows. This provides real-time calculations based on the calls information and looks for similar records.

A matching matrix is provided which will show potentially matched items based on a number of criteria such as the linked CI or Service. All Problem report data is retained in the database once resolved or closed.

In Summary

vFire provides very good functionality for users with all levels of proactive problem management maturity.

vFire provides more automation than most of the other solutions reviewed and goes the extra mile with regard to fault finding and diagnosis via its graphical interface. I believe that this solution would be a good option for most medium to large enterprise organisations.

In Their Own Words

vFire is an Enterprise level IT Service Management Software tool made by Alemba. As the successor to VMware's Service Manager product (formerly infraEnterprise), Alemba's vFire has inherited over 20 years of industry knowledge and offers a truly innovative User Interface that puts customer experience front and centre.

vFire offers support for implementing and delivering ITIL best practices. vFire provides out-of-the-box ITIL functionality for all major ITIL processes including: Incident, Request Fulfilment, Problem, Service Level, Knowledge, Change, Release & Deployment, Service Configuration & Asset, Service Catalog and Availability Management.

Key features:

- Mould the system to your own requirements with flexible configuration options and a powerful screen designer.
- Easily deploy an integrated, actionable Service Catalog that aligns IT activities to business services.
- Publicize Service expectations and reduce the impact of service outages on business operations.
- Effortlessly discover and map inter-dependencies between infrastructure components, applications, and business services, across both physical and virtual environments through Federated CMDB connectors.
- Monitor and report performance against Service Level Agreements and Service Availability targets, to demonstrate the value IT provides to the business leveraging third party event management tools.
- Easily model and automate your organization's business processes in a powerful workflow builder which can be used to automate any IT or non-IT processes.
- Ensure processes are carried out in a consistent, best practice manner that adhere to audit and compliance requirements.
- Ensure that ITIL processes implemented are tailored to meet your site specific needs

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