

# FixStream Empowers Operational Transformation at a Global Digital Services Company

## Abstract

It is rare when heightened expectations and promises turn out to be real and easily delivered. This is true for almost anything in life, and especially, when it comes to IT vendors marketing application, infrastructure, and service management software. However, here we have an exception. The interview in this report traces a FixStream Meridian deployment from initial skepticism to jaw-dropping success in a very large and demanding infrastructure and service environment.

Meridian's ability to combine analytics with a fully dynamic mapping of business service dependencies across the full, complex and heterogenous application-infrastructure does, in fact, sound too good to be true. But FixStream has taken a unique approach that has enabled a full complement of critical values—supporting not only operations, but business stakeholders, development, and sales and marketing.

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## A Brief Look at FixStream's Meridian

FixStream's Meridian platform is designed to provide unique levels of visibility, efficiency, and control. The following are a few architectural highlights:

- **Discovery** – Meridian autodiscovery is agentless but can leverage operational data from third-party tools through its APIs. It captures *inventory* dynamically, including device metadata for network, storage, bare-metal, and virtual computing (VM, hypervisor) resources, as well as process specifics including process ID, name, port mapping, and interface details. It also creates a *topology* via interface details including identity, configuration, access, status, and performance.
- **Application Dependency Mapping** – Meridian can track interdependencies across applications and services, such as web servers, middleware, application servers, and databases, with network, storage, and server infrastructures. These application maps can in turn be easily mapped to more global business process views.
- **Analytics: Operational Intelligence** – Meridian offers an efficient approach to big data with a wide range of analytic options, including a correlation framework, a rules engine, real-time streaming analytics, batch analytics, and machine learning. These can deliver extremely fast root-cause analysis with just a few clicks, as well as trending and real-time predictive insights for performance, security, change, and capacity management requirements.
- **Dashboards** – Meridian can support both executive and IT Operations stakeholders, as well as development, security, and IT service management teams. As characterized in the following interview, these dashboards provide compelling overviews with facile drill-downs to support a wide variety of stakeholders and decision-making. The dashboard widgets are externally personalized and contextual.

## Interview with a VP of Security and Shared Services at Global Digital Services Company Using FixStream Meridian

This interview highlights many benefits achieved via Meridian, ranging from problem and incident management, to broader support for network engineering, to support for security and development, as well as a growing role in managing IoT-related requirements as they relate to broadcasting. And perhaps the single most surprising example of value is FixStream's role in supporting business development by providing visibly compelling proof to future customers that the services they invest in will be high performing and reliable.

### *Can you provide more background on your role and organization?*

I've been with my company now about nine months. I joined after being asked to address some serious issues in the areas of monitoring and alerting. In my current position, I also have responsibilities for change and incident management, as well as providing support for our service desk, for facilities, and for security. Facilities includes heating and power management in two of our three data centers, one in the U.S. and one in India.

There are about 250 people worldwide in our IT organization managed by one of our executive vice presidents (EVPs). I report to the EVP for Information Technology, and I have about 50 people in my organization. That includes four direct reports. One for change, problem, and incident management; one for our network operations center (NOC) in India and our service desk; one for local support in terms of desktop and laptop access; and one in charge of physical security for our headquarters location, also in the U.S.

### *You mentioned that you came on board because of serious issues in the areas of monitoring and alerting—can you provide some history around this?*

Yes, of course. I've been involved in IT infrastructure management for more than 25 years, where I've often focused on process improvements and new technology to improve client experience.

Recently, I was working with a global business process outsourcing company with a very large IT organization of more than 700 people. When our company was sold, I got a call from the organization where I'm working now, which was struggling with performance monitoring and management. They wanted someone with experience to help them realign their technology investments and processes.

### *How was it that you decided on FixStream Meridian? And how did your deployment go?*

About two years ago, I first became acquainted with FixStream in my prior organization for global business outsourcing. I took a look at FixStream Meridian, which at first, frankly, seemed too good to be true from their PowerPoint. But we did a proof of concept with several CTOs and CIOs who were friends of mine, and got validation after validation.

When we first planned to deploy FixStream Meridian in my current environment, there was a similar reaction. It seemed too good to be true, and the organization had been shell shocked from other investments in monitoring that didn't pay off. So we had to show value fast. Unfortunately we tried to move a little too quickly at first—not doing the basics that FixStream provides in a list, like making sure that the relevant SNMP traps are turned on. Nonetheless, it only took two months. And compared to other platform deployments in the past—which took more than a year with a lot of consulting work—this was still a very rapid deployment.

### *What about administration on Meridian?*

Well, I actually have zero people fully dedicated to administering Meridian. I do have two professionals who have many other responsibilities in my organization who help extend FixStream functionality. To a large degree FixStream administers itself, even in our constantly changing environment.

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### *Who are the current stakeholders using FixStream Meridian?*

Pretty much all of my team and most of IT with its 250 people. Our lead for change, problem, and incident management is using FixStream Meridian and sits near me in headquarters, where we have two FixStream screens proudly displayed not only for our use, but also for our senior executive team, as well as our marketing team who use it to show new clients shopping for our services.

One of the biggest users for monitoring and alerting is our NOC in India, where we are still getting alerts fed into FixStream from Solar Winds. By the way we are planning to phase out SolarWinds in the near term and just use FixStream, which should save us significant dollars. Our NOC team is made up of network analysts who escalate some issues up to network engineering subject-matter experts in the larger IT organization. These network engineers also depend on FixStream for efficient remediation. In addition, network engineering is responsible for managing our global network, with MPLS switches, routers, and Cisco UCS chassis—all of which are currently under FixStream for management.

FixStream is providing strong value for the team responsible for systems and database management, and for an applications team targeting investments such as Oracle, Citrix, and Siebel. That's part of the core value of FixStream—it reaches across all critical layers from the application downward through the infrastructure and captures interdependencies. Because of this we can also leverage it for dynamic capacity management.

And FixStream is being used by our IT security team.

Finally, I should point out that FixStream Meridian is also being used to support application development, a use case we're still maturing. Right now FixStream is providing the eyes and ears of how our in-house-developed applications are performing in production, which is extremely critical for the clients who pay us good money for our services. And we're maturing that support to include preproduction monitoring support for application development and Q/A.

I should add that while stakeholder reception was cautious at first, now it's extremely positive. So positive, in fact, that many in IT are looking for ways to extend what we do with FixStream Meridian. If it could make coffee, I think they'd want it to do that for them.

### *What would you say about working with FixStream?*

Above all, for me, it's a valuable partnership. FixStream learns from its customers and evolves its solution accordingly—sometimes with surprising speed.

### *Can you quantify some of the benefits you've received from FixStream Meridian?*

Indeed I can. We estimate that we will be saving about \$500,000 in toolset consolidation in the area of monitoring as we extend FixStream to replace SolarWinds, ManageEngine Application Manager, Microsoft System Center Service Manager, and CA's Nimsoft, among other tools. We've already eliminated all but SolarWinds, and that should be gone within the first half of next year.

In terms of mean-time-to-resolution (MTTR), we were averaging about 2.5 hours per incident before FixStream. Now it's down to 38 minutes, a time reduction approaching 500%. We used to get lost trying to figure out where problems resided, and then spending even more time trying to assess the specific causes and resolve them. Now we get an alert showing us exactly what's broken with easy drill-down,

much like a CMDB, to understand all the relevant components for remediation. This is very significant for our business because one of the advantages we offer customers is speed. In fact, some of our clients had been complaining about our performance before FixStream—and now everyone is committed to us. Service availability buys brand loyalty—and that's thanks to FixStream.

You might say we never had eyes before. Now we have eyes. This has helped in another area—in audits. As it turned out, before FixStream Meridian we had no clue how many servers we were running. In one instance, we thought we had five Xen hypervisors and it turned out that the number was more like 95. So we had significant issues with audits, assets and inventory as well as monitoring and change management. Now that's easy—we just point and click and get a total, compared to what used to take at least five hours and a lot of guessing. All the assets come up on one screen, and this has saved us real money in dealing with hardware costs and software audits. Traditionally we've been spending about 20 hours per month on audits and questions from finance on the status of assets. That's around \$65,000 to \$75,000 a year in terms of FTE resource allocation.

And there's a fourth very dollars-and-cents benefit that I've already referred to—the two FixStream Meridian screens that are near our EVP's office. We use these as a selling point to encourage new business by showing prospective customers the strength and reliability of our very well-managed technology environment. Our EVP comes out of his office, shows potential customers a map of the world and our topology, and does a little drill-down showing global service performance details in real-time on the FixStream screen. And they walk away feeling even more positive about taking their business to us. FixStream Meridian is a confidence builder.

## EMA Perspective

Little can speak more convincingly than an authentic voice behind a real deployment. And, in this case, the VP of Security and Shared Services makes FixStream Meridian's benefits very clear. Here's a quick summary:

- Strong support for change, problem, and incident management across a wide-ranging, global stakeholder population
- Support for security teams and development
- Unique value in gaining executive respect and serving as a catalyst for new business development with prospective customers
- Dramatic savings in toolset consolidation, a nearly 500% reduction in mean-time-to-resolution, and saving thousands of dollars in inventory and asset-related audits
- All this with minimal requirements for administration and fast time to value in deployment

Perhaps the single most compelling story about FixStream is that it took a “too-good-to-be-true” offering and made it real, deployable, and highly successful. I have to admit that in my first “Vendor to Watch” assessment of FixStream in April 2015, I also had to take a tone of caution, if not actual skepticism.<sup>1</sup> But this dialog, as well as other indications of progress to date, has strongly shown that FixStream is not only a “vendor to watch,” it is a vendor to seriously consider investing in. Consider FixStream an established “vendor to follow.”

<sup>1</sup> EMA, “EMA Vendor to Watch: FixStream,” April 2015.

### 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 EMA's 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](http://www.enterprisemanagement.com) or [blogs.enterprisemanagement.com](http://blogs.enterprisemanagement.com). You can also follow EMA on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

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