

CRON – The Good, the Bad & Ugly

Introduction

A number of inquiries we get relating to OpsWise Automation Center are from organizations that are growing, and as a result, it's simply time to replace CRON.

For decades, administrators of UNIX and UNIX-like systems such as Linux have relied on cron, the built-in systems scheduler, in order to schedule and automate tasks. In this post, we will explore CRON's strengths and weaknesses as well look at the challenges that this approach as opposed to an enterprise-automation approach, such as OpsWise!

CRON the Good

There's a lot of good about cron, for instance:

- As an embedded tool, it's free
- The implementation of CRON is available across a large number of operating systems, and is consistently implemented
- Cron is immediately available as a service, no software to install
- From a security perspective, users can have their own individual CRONTAB files and do their own scheduling
- From a scheduling perspective, it provides good flexibility in terms of scheduling capabilities and especially good at running cyclic jobs (e.g. runs every 20 minutes)

CRON the Bad

- Scheduling not sophisticated enough to understand holidays, so avoiding running workload on holidays or specific days (e.g. an inventory day) requires significant manual intervention
- Stuck to the server cron is running on
- No workflow logic, you cannot take different processing directions based on the success, failure, or error code received
- Stuck on time-only triggering. Much of the time, automation can be driven off of file-based activity or on RDBMS activity. With cron, you are stuck with just time

CRON the Ugly

- Maintenance headache as you add more and more servers. Want to run the same scheduled task on twenty different servers? That's twenty different servers you need to log into, create a cron tab entry, test, and debug
- No central point of control - users have to manually log in and look at the output of their workload in order to determine success or failure
- No notifications automatically if something goes wrong, which could be hours, or days. You are blind to processing errors.

- No audit trail for workload = compliance nightmare. If you have initiatives such as SOX, HIPPA, or PCI, a lack of evidence is problematic. The collection process, while possible, is very time consuming

OpsWise as a CRON replacement

OpsWise addresses the Bad and the Ugly of cron, providing you with:

- Definition of tasks and workflows across all of your servers, and centralized monitoring of job status from a single web-based enterprise console
- Notifications - get an email notification directly to your Smartphone every time something goes, wrong, including diagnostic output so you can pinpoint the error
- Manage cross-platform dependencies across servers and operating systems through a simple drag-and-drop workflow editor
- Automatically react to file activity instead of being dependent on time
- Full Audit Trail, Audit Reports, and Role-based security makes being compliant and tracking compliance data a breeze
- More sophisticated scheduling, including calendaring. We even provide a unique cron-compatibility mode for those used to scheduling using CRON's five positional parameters. This also makes migrating your data from cron far easier than with other solutions

And, of course, many, many more benefits.

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