

Comic Relief Raises US\$94 Million with Help of Web Application Testing



Comic Relief
London, England
www.comicrelief.com

Industry:

Public Sector

Annual Revenue:

US\$136 million

Employees:

120

Oracle Products & Services:

Oracle Load Testing for Web Applications

Key Benefits:

- More than doubled the amount of donations taken with help of pre-campaign testing
- Processed 450,000 transactions during 7-hour period, peaking at 54 transactions per second
- Ensured that the organization's e-commerce site would be able to meet anticipated demand
- Ensured that the IT infrastructure could handle traffic processed by all 9,800 call center agents, almost triple the number in 2005

“On Red Nose Day, our Web site is one of the busiest e-commerce sites in the world. By testing thoroughly beforehand with Oracle Application Testing Suite, we can ensure availability to hundreds of thousands of donors during a critical few hours.” – Charlotte Melén, Web Technology Manager, Comic Relief

One of the most widely recognized charity brands in the United Kingdom, Comic Relief has always been an early adopter of new technology. With the rise of broadband, Comic Relief decided to emphasize its Red Nose Day Web site as the main channel through which people could access information and make donations. Red Nose Day is a U.K.-wide fundraising event organized by Comic Relief every two years, which culminates in a night of comedy and thought-provoking documentary films. It is the biggest television fundraising event in the U.K. calendar.

The campaign has grown tremendously in recent years. In 2003, the Red Nose Day site processed more than US\$5.4 million (£3.6 million) in donations, and by 2005 this figure had grown to more than US\$12 million (£8 million).

“Early on, we realized that the demands we were going to place on our technical infrastructure were unique. We needed to guarantee that people visiting the site would be able to get the information they needed and make their donations quickly and easily,” said Charlotte Melén, Web technology manager, Comic Relief.

In 2007, Comic Relief raised US\$30 million (£20 million) online with total donations for the entire campaign reaching US\$94 million (£63 million). More than 450,000 individual transactions were processed during the critical seven-hour telethon. At peak times, volume reached 54 transactions per second.

By using Oracle Application Testing Suite in advance to simulate many thousands of users accessing the Web site at one time, Comic Relief was confident that its infrastructure would be able to handle the tremendous demands it would experience during the event.

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Charlotte Melén
Web Technology
Manager
Comic Relief

Testing for Traffic Spikes

The Red Nose Day campaign site needed to be fun, exciting, and informative. It was also the perfect channel for people to make donations. It had to be simple and easy for people of all abilities to use, but also secure and effective for the charity. Comic Relief also needed to make sure that its call center agents were able to collect donors' money quickly and effectively using the same Web-based system.

The major concern for the charity was density of activity. The bulk of its donations would be received in a very short period of time—just seven hours. The charity knew its site would be one of the busiest e-commerce sites in the world during this period. It could not afford any down time.

From past experience, Comic Relief knew the volume of donation traffic is stimulated by the emotional content of the TV program; therefore, not only did the infrastructure have to cope with a huge volume of traffic, it also had to be able to handle large spikes in traffic throughout a very short time period.

In line with the growth of the campaign year-over-year, the Red Nose Day IT infrastructure has evolved to meet the demand. In 2003, there were no call center agents using a Web-based portal. By 2005, more than 3,500 agents were using the organization's Web portal, and in 2007, more than 9,800 agents accessed the portal across 76 call centers.

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Identifying and Removing Bottlenecks

Comic Relief used Oracle's Rapid Bottleneck Identification (RBI) methodology to identify potential bottlenecks that would have a negative impact on the end-user experience. Using a modular, iterative approach to load testing, testers focus on performance issues one at a time, fixing problems as they go. By using this approach, Comic Relief was able to improve the overall application quality and enhance the experience of people donating through the Web site.

“I would advise anyone putting in place a business-critical Web application to test thoroughly. It’s a key quality assurance measure to show whether or not an application will perform under traffic. We certainly could not run our campaigns without such rigorous testing.”

Charlotte Melén
Web Technology
Manager
Comic Relief

Oracle Application Testing Suite gave Comic Relief the ability to define and manage the whole testing process, validate the application functionality, and ensure that the applications would perform under the anticipated demand.

Why Oracle?

Comic Relief had previously used Oracle Application Testing Suite to test and optimize the infrastructure for Sport Relief—Comic Relief’s sister national fundraising event. This reassured Comic Relief that the technology was capable of testing the application to the optimum level prior to the event.

Melén explained, “We chose Oracle Application Testing Suite because it’s the leading test application on the market. We also have an excellent relationship with Oracle. We don’t have a test manager in-house, so having Oracle consultants on-hand to help with the testing process is a tremendous help to us”.

Oracle also provides database solutions for Comic Relief, which helps to ensure consistency and continuity across and between applications. This means that Oracle can also identify any additional database requirements during the testing process.

Implementation Process

Comic Relief worked with Oracle consultants to implement Oracle Application Testing Suite onsite. Every test campaign goes through a set process starting with performance and tuning and then moving on to load and stress testing. This process typically takes about two weeks.

By working closely with the Oracle team, Comic Relief benefits from Oracle’s experience in interpreting the test results—a process that is as important as the tests themselves. Oracle is able to advise as to where Comic Relief needs to re-run its tests and suggest additional resources it may need to put in place.

Moving forward, Comic Relief will start tests for the 2009 Red Nose Day campaign. As 98% of all donation traffic will go through the Web application, it is essential that Comic Relief continues to stretch and test its capacity to ensure that the site can meet the expected demand.

“We’re hoping to double what we saw in 2007. We’ll be increasing our number of call center agents, and we’ll be testing for peaks of 150 transactions per second to ensure we can handle an expected 750,000 transactions in six hours,” Melén said.

“I would advise anyone putting in place a business-critical Web application to test thoroughly. It’s a key quality assurance measure to show whether or not an application will perform under traffic. We certainly could not run our campaigns without such rigorous testing,” Melén concluded.

Comic Relief was established in 1985 by comedians who wanted to do something to help others. It is a charity that aims to help vulnerable people suffering poverty and injustice both in the United Kingdom and abroad. Comic Relief has two primary fundraising campaigns; Red Nose Day and Sport Relief.