

PMG Enables U.S. Home Improvement Retailer to Securely Orchestrate Critical IT Processes

Server patching portal reduces IT backlog and self-service automation delivers a better user experience

When a large, U.S.-based home improvement retailer was in search of a scalable, secure way to orchestrate server patching, it came across several challenges and simply couldn't go it alone.

The retailer wanted to do its own patching in Linux and Windows. However, it sometimes needed to run these scripts in environments that required interaction with various other software deployment platforms that its Process Automation group couldn't access.

So, the home improvement giant turned to PMG to help.

Previous orchestrator fails to deliver

The 400,000-plus employee retailer had previously used a well-known system center orchestrator that proved unreliable. Plus, it required a significant amount of training for a team member to become productive and could only be used by employees with technical backgrounds. And since the retailer had a limited number of employees with such expertise, the tool simply wasn't sufficient.

"Any time one of our systems needed patching, there was a backlog, whether it was a new or updated script," said a product specialist on the home retailer's Process Automation team. "We needed a way to develop our resource pool to keep on top of an ever-changing variety of patching methods and platforms needed for critical server updates."

To make matters worse, if team members found a bug or wanted a new feature added, the vendor failed to communicate in a timely manner.

"Any time we had a service request, it was uncertain whether that change would ever happen," said the product specialist.

Additionally, the basic functionality of the orchestration tool was undeniably too basic – as in 'what you see is what you get.' The home improvement retailer's Process Automation team needed to have a single portal that could target servers in multiple lifecycles.

Patching automation provides beneficial new features

The team that undertook the patching project was initially tasked with automating Windows patching, which involved using PMG to connect to a third-party patching platform. Specifically, PMG set up this connection and sent email notifications to stakeholders, while the enterprise patching platform did the patching. About a year later, Linux server patching became a much-anticipated new solution.

The six-person project team – a project manager, product owner, workflow configuration developer, application programming interface (API) developer, database designer and user experience/user interface (UX/UI) developer – was challenged with the inability to work across various environments. For example, it couldn't initiate patching QA servers from the PMG production environment. So, the team worked with PMG to combine remote actions with REST actions through Relay and implement low-code automation to conquer multiple lifecycles.

"The PMG platform has so much flexibility," said a PMG product specialist for workflow automation at the home retailer. "There's a drag-and-drop way of doing things, but if you want to get under the covers and use scripting tools or code to write things or populate data, you can."

The low-code, drag-and-drop capabilities enabled the Process Automation team to bring other employees into the fold and ramp them up quickly to deliver new, major features.

Enabling a self-service environment

Once the patching project was underway, the home improvement retailer team joined with PMG to initiate several do-it-yourself, server-management solutions ranging from rebuilds to ownership changes to scheduling reboots. The purpose was to provide server owners insight into the servers they own.

Specifically, server owners, regardless of their technical expertise, would be able to use the portal to schedule automated reboots for multiple platforms from a single interface. And through PMG-orchestrated workflows, they could schedule these reboots in systems like ServiceNow – without going through IT.

With PMG pulling the data from various systems and delivering it to the home improvement retailer's device management portal in real time, users became empowered to get information about their devices without outside help.

The PMG platform automatically notifies users that a reboot is scheduled for their laptop, desktop or mobile devices. Plus, it allows them to search for different devices and request refreshes or replacements for that equipment. Providing a coordinated single environment for these related self-service server management functions has greatly improved the user experience.

Expanding patching processes to other sites and servers

Through PMG, the patching solution has empowered the company to achieve greater than 95% patching compliance throughout all of its the data centers. In fact, this major success has prompted the home improvement retailer to initiate more customized patching processes for another 20,000-plus multi-site and database servers.

In sum, the comprehensive solution enables:

- Patching through a single portal;
- Self-service for end users;
- Handling of post-patching activities;
- Summary of results for anything related to patching; and
- Ability to create change or incident tickets in ServiceNow.

What began as a single contractor resource has blossomed into six employees within the home improvement retailer's Process Automation group working in the PMG platform – building workflows and other solutions.

In 2021, the team plans to leverage the PMG App Designer to build dashboards for its operation support teams. These dashboards will take advantage of some of the platform's front-end capabilities in addition to using the workflow engine for orchestration.

“I was able to begin building in PMG quickly. Within three months, I knew as much, or more, than the contractor who built the initial solution. The entire team has benefited greatly and found tremendous value in the PMG platform's ease of use.”

- PMG product specialist on the home retailer's Process Automation team.

About PMG

PMG offers a low- and no-code software platform that empowers businesses to quickly build applications and automation solutions using drag-and-drop designers. For 15 years, enterprises have achieved 70%-80% efficiencies in their business processes by using PMG. The platform is architected to support quick wins, delivering powerful and sustainable solutions through configuration rather than coding. Most importantly, PMG delivers on its promise of committed partnership, ranking highly in G2.com's relationship metrics for low-code DPA providers. For more information, visit www.pmg.net.

121 Perimeter Center W
Suite 200
Atlanta, GA 30346
866.764.6381

sales@pmg.net
www.pmg.net