Compassion International Wields Data to Protect and Care for Children in Poverty

Key Challenges

To serve and protect nearly 2 million children around the world, Compassion International needed a way to ensure system uptime, secure financial data and screen sponsors faster and more effectively.

Key Results

With the Splunk® platform, Compassion International turns raw data into actionable insights that protect donors, curb exploitation, measure funding impact and release more children from poverty and trafficking.

Compassion®
Releasing children from poverty
in Jesus' name

Industry: Nonprofit

Solutions/Use cases:
IT Operations, Security, Business Analytics

Every year, Compassion International helps release more than 2 million children from poverty around the world.

Taking a holistic approach to child development, this Christian ministry works with an extensive network of sponsors and over 8,000 international church partners to deliver physical, social, economic and spiritual care to children living in extreme poverty. To restore lives on such a large scale, the Compassion International team leverages insights from Splunk to ensure seamless operations at every stage — whether screening sponsors to protect children, tracking gifts to ensure delivery, or securing financial data to maintain sponsor trust.

One Platform to Meet IT, Security and Business Needs

Caring for more than 2 million children scattered across the globe is a monumental undertaking. To ensure both children and sponsors are protected, the Compassion International team must manage and secure everything from financial, sponsor and child data to information about systems health and network connections across the world. "Data is critical to our mission," says Jonathan Wagner, senior monitoring specialist at Compassion. "That's why we bring data from applications, processes, servers and databases — roughly 1.5 million events per day — all into Splunk."

Data Driven Outcomes

2M+
children supported every year

<5 min
to screen sponsors with Splunk, compared to one week previously

~120
Splunk dashboards equip business teams with the data they need to make smart decisions

Compassion began using Splunk technology for traditional IT and security use cases, including log management and as a SIEM. The monitoring and alerting group, for example, still relies on Splunk to maintain 99.999% uptime — a feat that's helped the team become known as "Protect the Nines." With Splunk's sophisticated monitoring, the team narrows individual alerts to a specific issue to proactively pinpoint and triage the issue before it ever becomes an outage, helping Compassion provide resources to children and sponsors without interruption.

Over time, more teams — ranging from executives and the office of risk management to marketing and fundraising — began harnessing the power of the Splunk platform. "Everybody across the board is realizing that Splunk is not just an IT tool, it's a business tool that informs critical decisions," says Wagner, who has helped develop around 120 dashboards for various business units. "When we have the data in Splunk, we can see the bigger picture, correlate information and understand if there are larger

issues. More teams are coming to me, asking, 'Is there a way we could do this with Splunk?' And of course, the answer's always yes."

The Application Programming Interface (API) Development team, for instance, used Splunk to go from 100 alerts every week to only two, freeing time for the highest priority initiatives. Wagner says, "Now with Splunk, we've automated more of these 'normal' issues so we can focus on creating innovative, outside-the-box solutions that help more children in need."

PATCH: Protect All the Children

One of these innovative solutions is the PATCH (Protect All the Children) initiative, which protects children from those with potentially malicious motives. Born out of business discussions with Compassion's product management team, PATCH uses Splunk's machine learning and data processing to screen sponsors, automatically flagging anyone affiliated with a sexual predators database.

"Before Splunk, we had a spreadsheet of 'bad actors' that we were trying to manually maintain, but it simply wasn't scalable," says John Edom, Compassion's IT principal of monitoring and automation. In their initial proof of concept, Edom's team found that by using Splunk, they could find far more bad actors — in a fraction of the time.

Once implemented, PATCH yielded immediate results. "The first day we used Splunk, we found over 70 accounts that were tied to sex offenders," says JM Pearson, PATCH's lead investigator for Compassion's global and domestic security. While the previous screening process had been shortened from 30 days to about a week after the sponsor signed up, the Splunk platform has whittled the process down to five minutes or, in some cases, seconds.

In addition to screening sponsors, PATCH also screens letters between sponsors and children, flagging out-of-channel communications like social media (which can pose a safety risk) and potential grooming language (which indicates intended exploitation). Over time, the PATCH team and Pearson have trained the Splunk platform to prioritize high-risk matches, such as letters mailed from known prisons and motel addresses, which helps maximize his time as the sole investigator for PATCH.

A Donor Network Built on Trust

Building — and maintaining — trust among sponsors and donors is paramount to Compassion's success. The nonprofit uses the Splunk platform to secure critical financial processes — from monitoring transactions involving physical checks and protecting credit card systems, to using PATCH technology to spare sponsors from scams.

Compassion also uses Splunk to ensure that funding for gifts, such as for a birthday or special occasion, reaches its intended recipient. The Splunk platform tracks a complex set of systems to create 10 reports that provide clarity around the gift process and show any anomalies. "If there's an anomaly, we can proactively follow up to ensure the sponsor's gift makes it to the child," says Edom. "It helps us be more transparent with our sponsors and verify that the child is benefiting from those funds."

While Compassion has been serving children for 68 years, the nonprofit is far from finished in its pursuit to release more children from poverty. "Given the times that we're going through right now, we need to be able to reach and serve even more children," says Edom. "By allowing us to make decisions based on data, the Splunk platform will become even more vital to serving and protecting the children who need it most."

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