WP engine®

Case Study

HIVE MEDIA GROUP

Helping young businesses scale with New Relic alerts.

Hive Media uses WP Engine Application Performance to manage high-scale website traffic effectively and build its business faster.

Industry
Content Publishing

Site
hivemedia.com
trend-chaser.com

Challenge
Successfully integrate application performance and management tools across a growing portfolio of content and websites.

Solution
WP Engine Digital Experience Platform, Application Performance.

Results
Today, Hive Media Group is easily managing software application and web traffic issues before they become detrimental to any of their sites' overall performance.

Hive Media Group is a publishing company operating numerous web properties that provide engaging content for visitors around the world. The company's technologies offer optimized campaigns across dozens of native, social, and programmatic ad networks. When paired with highly-verticalized publishing platforms, Hive is able to deliver hyper-focused content with a high-performing advertising experience to users anywhere in the world.

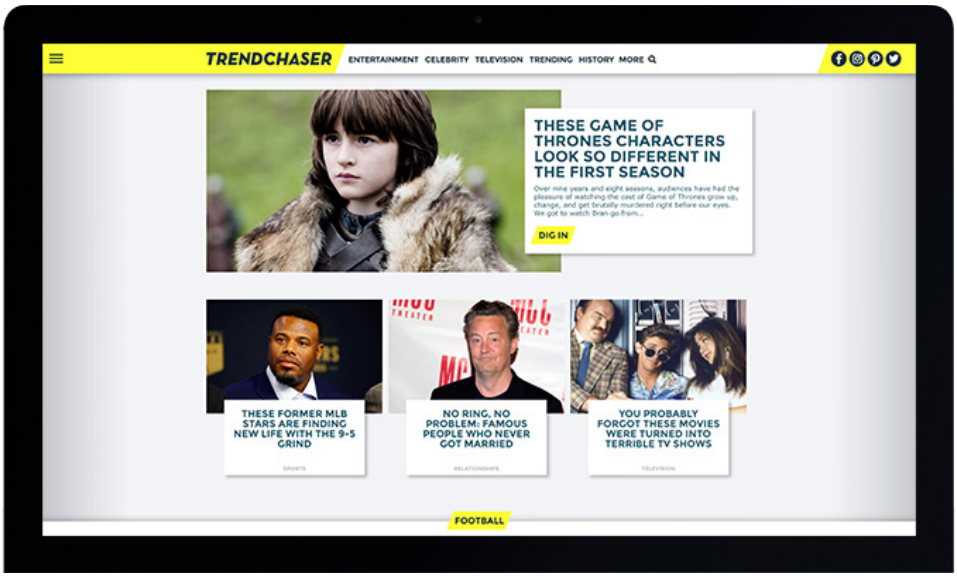
The challenge.

Hive Media is an online publishing company with a growing network of engaging, highly-verticalized websites that are optimized for specific demographics. Using proprietary software, Hive uses data and analytics to focus on which content will perform best and then places it on sites where it will have the furthest reach. Since the company's founding in 2016, those efforts have been paying dividends.

"Overall, we're happy to have a partner in WP Engine who is able to align with our goals and keep us moving forward."

Azhar Salim,
Chief Technology Officer,
Hive Media Group

Today, Hive owns and operates some 25 (and counting) websites which generate more than 4 billion monthly impressions and over 800 million monthly global page views. Managing that level of traffic and making sure it can grow at scale is obviously a high priority for the business, but a couple of years ago, when Hive was getting its start, the last thing its founders had in mind was managing the back-end of a content management system (CMS).



Instead, their focus was on growing their business—improving software and finding new, innovative ways to compete. In an effort to offload some of the infrastructure maintenance needed to keep things up and running, Hive enlisted the help of a managed hosting provider. After a short period of time, however, it became apparent that they were going to need more support from their provider, particularly when it came to security and application performance, not only to sustain the growth they were experiencing at the time but to be able to grow their increasing traffic load successfully.

Because the websites Hive operates are all built using WordPress, members of their IT team decided to search for a new managed hosting provider that had WordPress-specific experience and expertise.

"Which led us to WP Engine," said Azhar Salim, Hive Media Group's Chief Technology Officer. "We were immediately impressed with the offering and happier with the level of service and support we received once we moved over, and it's been a solid relationship ever since."

Even though Salim and his colleagues felt their WordPress environments were being better managed, they still had concerns about their application performance management and monitoring capabilities.

"At that point in time, we were going through some growing pains with regards to the way our business was scaling," he said. "We were on a much smaller instance back then, and we were starting to see some performance issues. We also didn't have enough visibility into when or why issues were occurring until it was too late."

Salim said he and his team felt like they were taking a shot in the dark every time they needed to troubleshoot and figure out what was causing a particular problem. They would have to guess when an issue started and then figure out what changes had rolled out around that time. From there, they would have to undertake a long, time-consuming process of reverse engineering to try and find what was causing the performance degradation. They knew there had to be a better way.

"When we were with our previous provider, they briefly offered a New Relic performance monitoring solution, but then stopped offering it," Salim said. "When we saw that WP Engine was offering New Relic-powered Application Performance Monitoring (APM), we wanted to start using it right away."

The solution.

Hive began using APM at the start of 2018, and Salim said he and his team began reaping its benefits immediately.

"It's been a great tool for us," he said. "The ability for us to monitor the way our software applications are affecting performance is excellent visibility to have. But we've also been extremely happy with the alerting capabilities APM offers—the ability to set an alert so we'll be notified if, for example, our throughput is going up or down, or our Apdex score is going below an acceptable threshold. We have alerts set up so that if any of those things happen, we'll receive an email warning."

In fact, Salim and his team have even gone a step further than just email alerts and tied their APM email notifications to a text-to-speech service that calls them when they hit an alert threshold or when an alert does trigger.

"That's been an awesome extension of the tool," Salim said. "It gives us peace of mind that we'll know if something's up, with plenty of time and opportunity to fix it."

The results.

Beyond peace of mind, Hive Media has been able to tackle some significant traffic challenges since integrating APM into their platform.

"We've been able to dive deep into the transactions and get function-level drill-down of where performance issues are," Salim said.

"It's definitely been a boon for us, especially in the last six months as our traffic has scaled even more and we've added more features. Over that time, there's been more stress on our servers, so it's been great to be able to go in and find out what URLs are causing an issue or beyond that, what functions within WordPress might be taking up the most time—whether it's on the database, memcache, or actually in PHP."

In one specific scenario, the Hive team released a change that seemed benign and didn't appear to have any major effect on the server. Within a few days, however, after enough traffic had switched to that new feature, the Hive team started to see a slow ramp-up in average response time.

"But before it had reached a critical point to where it would have taken the servers down or affected our clients or websites, New Relic sent us a warning, and eventually an alert, and we hopped on," Salim said. "We were able to pinpoint the issue just by looking at a graph in the APM tool—we could see what date it started, what changes were recorded in our changelog, and then when we looked back at it in New Relic, it all matched up. So we were able to go back and know where to start fixing things."

Salim added that the entire process, from start to finish, took a couple of days, and then he and his team had figured out the scope of the problem and released a fix.

"But had it gone on, and if all of our traffic had switched to the new feature before we fixed it, it would have become a rollback scenario where we would have had to make a knee-jerk reaction. Instead, we were able to fix it relatively quickly and keep moving forward."

Today, the Hive team is looking at new horizons and plans to continue working with WP Engine as their business keeps growing.

"Now that we have a stable traffic profile, risk management is a bigger factor," Salim said. "We're hoping WP Engine continues to find new ways to help us, including taking the APM example to the next level—testing rollouts on a small percentage of traffic so we can verify that everything looks good before we roll out to everyone."

"Overall, we're just happy to have a partner in WP Engine who is able to align with our goals and keep us moving forward."

About WP Engine.

WP Engine is the world's leading WordPress digital experience platform that gives companies of all sizes the agility, performance, intelligence, and integrations they need to drive their business forward faster. Founded in 2010, WP Engine is headquartered in Austin, Texas, and has offices in San Francisco, California; San Antonio, Texas; London, England; Limerick, Ireland; and Brisbane, Australia.