

Delivering a Superior Game Experience Amid Unprecedented Growth Blizzard Entertainment® plays it smart in IT infrastructure sourcing

World of Warcraft®: An 8.5-Million-Subscriber Success

By January 2007, when it released World of Warcraft®: The Burning Crusade™, the first expansion set for its massively multiplayer online role-playing game, Blizzard Entertainment® was at the epicenter of a virtual universe comprising more than 8 million World of Warcraft subscribers around the globe. The record-setting launch underscored Blizzard's successful transition from a top developer to the unquestioned leader in managing an always-on immersive virtual world.

Challenge: Manage Growth While Meeting Rising Expectations

As World of Warcraft quickly became a global sensation following its initial launch in November 2004, player expectations for service uptime and performance also grew exponentially. To stay ahead of the curve, Blizzard had to simultaneously continue developing world-leading gaming innovations, deliver an ever-improving player experience, and manage the infrastructure growth necessary to rapidly scale real-time game interactivity. The imperative that had driven the company's initial growth—"do everything it takes to deliver a gold medal user experience"—meant operational costs were also growing exponentially. To continue to meet player expectations despite the mounting infrastructure pressures, Blizzard needed to reexamine its IT commitments to ensure every dollar spent externally to support its audience was allocated efficiently and effectively. For this evaluation, Blizzard enlisted RampRate's array of IT services optimization offerings.

Solution: Tapping an Efficient Ecosystem for IT Services Optimization

SPY Index™ for clarity on costs and service levels. Specifically, Blizzard contacted RampRate for an audit of contract cost and service levels. The data-driven analysis using RampRate's proprietary SPY Index™ proved Blizzard had done an exceptional job in its initial negotiations, but over time, costs had risen faster than general market rates at the required service levels. RampRate pinpointed specific opportunities to tip the balance back to fair value for Blizzard.

Efficient ecosystem to facilitate IT services purchasing and reduce overall risk. During the rapid audit process, RampRate demonstrated that not only could it offer a clear market snapshot, but that it could provide a whole ecosystem of high-powered services and data-driven resources to create and maintain IT services relationships for new and existing contracts—with minimal cost and risk to those relationships. By realigning and optimizing its current contracts through RampRate's ecosystem, Blizzard was able to access efficiencies and risk mitigation traditionally available only to the largest enterprise business process outsourcing projects.

Accelerated deal engine to optimize value. Due to World of Warcraft's ongoing rapid growth, Blizzard required additional expansion space in the U.S. and Europe as quickly as possible. Despite the urgency of these requirements, they were able to secure deals made at highly favorable costs. How? At the heart of the RampRate ITO ecosystem, the SPY Index™ operates as a deal-making engine that streamlines the process by, as in Blizzard's case, rapidly identifying new and incumbent vendors prequalified to meet stringent requirements and industry best practices.

Results

- **8-figure reductions in colocation and bandwidth costs—and future leverage through vendor diversification**
- **20% or more savings from aligning existing contracts—while rewriting SLAs to cutting-edge best practices**
- **Further savings from the identification and removal of unnecessary service components in existing contracts**
- **Content delivery network (CDN) expense significantly reduced by identifying multi-vendor strategy**
- **32 ITO projects completed within the first year**
- **New vendors rapidly and successfully engaged even when unpredictable growth required very fast expansion**

Continuing Advantages

As a participant in the RampRate ITO ecosystem, Blizzard enjoys many advantages. When a Blizzard site experienced undocumented hardware incompatibilities, RampRate sent its top electrical engineering expert to help coordinate diagnostics and workarounds that resolved the issue while minimizing player impact. When a vendor experienced two successive outages, RampRate helped Blizzard obtain a tougher SLA. Newly negotiated deals are also subject to annual audits, helping to eliminate gaps between cost and market value of IT services.

