With Passport, Circonus Adds a Real-Time Data Volume Dial to Observability Agents

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IDC's Quick Take

Observability vendor Circonus is wading into the emerging space of tools designed to help enterprises better control the scale – and associated rising costs – of observability data. Rather than filter data after it's collected, like some of the observability data pipeline management tools, Circonus's new Passport offering aims to help users collect only the data they need in the first place and make changes to data collection granularity on the fly.

Product Announcement Highlights

Circonus calls Passport a dynamic telemetry management solution, allowing users to collect and send only the data they need, when they need it. Passport issues instructions to many of the widely used observability agents to alter the amount of data they are collecting, making the change in about a minute. That means users can decide to collect the bare minimum – until a performance issue occurs, and then they can quickly collect data in finer granularity for a specified period of time in order to get the visibility they require to determine the cause of the problem.

Passport has a rules engine so that users could automate the above process. For instance, a user could send alerts – about a CPU spike or increase in latency -- from an observability tool to the rules engine, instructing Passport to automatically increase the polling rate of certain metrics, upsample traces or send a set of logs to an additional observability tool. Or, users can set rules to collect more data during business hours or during a particular event. Engineers can also kick off changes on a one-off basis, including setting a window of time so that the ramped up data collection automatically reverts.

Passport comprises an agent manager that communicates with a Passport control plane, which lives between agents and a pipeline management tool or observability tools. The agent managers poll the control plane and if a new configuration file is available, they orchestrate the download to the agents and trigger the agent restart.

The Passport dashboard can be used as an agent management tool, where users can see which agents are running where, and whether they are operating in good health. It's also where users can deploy new agents and set up new or temporary data collection configurations that can be deployed to agents en masse. Circonus thinks that this management use case will be attractive to organizations that are migrating agents, since many organizations end up supporting a variety of agents for potentially long periods of time.

Circonus is emphasizing that Passport effectively disassociates agent management and data collection strategies from observability or pipeline management vendors. Passport can be used in conjunction with Circonus's observability product, but it can also be used independently.

According to Circonus, early users have reported that cost savings related to reducing data collection is the primary value proposition, with the agent management capabilities an added benefit. Circonus is pricing Passport on a per-agent basis, with additional pricing models that better cater to Kubernetes/containerized environments potentially to come. Passport is currently in beta.

IDC's Point of View

Managing cost associated with observability is a hot topic. Cribl was an early market entrant with its observability pipeline management product that customers use to filter, deduplicate, enrich and route data to tools used for observability and security. A few other vendors have now entered the pipeline management sector and Cribl and others have also expanded their offerings. For instance, ObserveIQ's BindPlane and Calyptia do both pipeline management and agent fleet management. Cribl Edge is a product that is essentially an agent that performs some Cribl Stream functions, such as reduction and filtering, at the agent level.

Passport is conceptually different in that it aims to allow users to collect less data, rather than essentially edit data after it's collected. Circonus has the opportunity to differentiate Passport in two primary ways. One is that it is designed to allow users to make changes to agents on the fly, inviting organizations to regularly adjust data collection according to immediate needs. This would be a smart strategy for organizations, allowing them to reduce the amount of data that they collect on an ongoing basis for potentially notable cost savings. The trick for users will be collecting the right amount so that visibility doesn't suffer. Also, in some environments the minute or so that it may take to change the data collection rate could be too long to be effective. Passport's associated rules engine is a nice addition for automating data collection in some scenarios.

The second differentiator for Passport is that it is designed to work with existing agents that organizations have already deployed, without requiring them to deploy new or proprietary agents or standardize on a particular type of agent. Passport supports a number of popular agents out of the box, including Telegraf, the OpenTelemetry Collector, Datadog, New Relic, Filebeat and Metricbeat, with Fluent-bit on the short list of agents to come. Essentially any agent that allows for control via config files should work with Passport and Circonus plans to let users set up their own agents, in the event that an agent type isn't supported out of the box.

There are other agent management offerings on the market, some of which are designed to manage just one type of agent. For instance, Elastic Fleet is used to manage Elastic Agents. In the long term OpenTelemetry may lead to a notable reduction in the variety of agents that enterprises have to manage but IDC anticipates many years to come during which organizations are likely to have a variety of deployed agents. From an agent management perspective, Passport has the potential to improve staff efficiency by removing the manual work typically required in managing agents.

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