

Better Monitoring with WebWatchBot Series

Taking Action: Executing a Command

When server downtime must be kept to a minimum and taking preventive action is not possible, quick and responsive problem resolution is key to shortening downtime. Restarting a server or process can get things going again, but it can also mask the problem and increase downtime.

How does one decide which to do: restart the server - read reboot - or restart the process generating the error?

Take for example a web server that is generally error free and bears a moderate load of traffic. In the case of an outright failure to connect to this web server – connections are actively refused - it is probably best to alert via email to diagnose the problem first before restarting the server. This is especially true in a load-balancing situation where you have other servers that can pick-up the load for a short period of time. When only one server is involved, it may be best to simply restart the web server software. For Windows Operating Systems, e.g. Windows 2000 and Windows Server 2003, one can quickly restart IIS with the command “iisreset.exe” which is located in the \windows\system32 directory.

In the case of an error message or HTTP status code that denotes an error, restarting the web server software or restarting the server may not help at all. If the error is caused by faulty web application code, or a problem with the database, the error could reappear as soon as the web server is back up and running.

To monitor for these types of situations, one should put in place a two-pronged strategy. First, monitor for connectivity loss and setup actions to either restart the web server software process or restart the server completely. Second, monitor for error conditions and alert the appropriate people who can investigate the problem and find a permanent solution; restarting the process or server is simply overkill.