



HoGent

Faculteit Bedrijf en Organisatie

Analysis and design of an efficient NoSQL data storage schema for an interlinked recent activity feed

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Scriptie voorgedragen tot het bekomen van de graad van
professionele bachelor in de toegepaste informatica

Promotor:
Chantal Teerlinck

Instelling: Open Webslides

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Faculty of Business and Information Management

Analysis and design of an efficient NoSQL data storage schema for an interlinked recent activity feed

Florian Dejonckheere

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professional bachelor of applied computer science

Promotor:
Chantal Teerlinck

Institution: Open Webslides

Academic year: 2017-2018

Second examination period

Preface

Samenvatting

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Abstract

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Introduction

De inleiding moet de lezer net genoeg informatie verschaffen om het onderwerp te begrijpen en in te zien waarom de onderzoeksvraag de moeite waard is om te onderzoeken. In de inleiding ga je literatuurverwijzingen beperken, zodat de tekst vlot leesbaar blijft. Je kan de inleiding verder onderverdelen in secties als dit de tekst verduidelijkt. Zaken die aan bod kunnen komen in de inleiding (**Pollefliet2011**):

- context, achtergrond
- afbakenen van het onderwerp
- verantwoording van het onderwerp, methodologie
- probleemstelling
- onderzoeksdoelstelling
- onderzoeksvraag
- ...

0.1 Context

In this age of computers and smartphones, older and deprecated methods of teach are quickly being replaced by the digital equivalent. Course content has shifted from being printed in full-text on paper, to static slides on an overhead projector and to the digital screen present in every modern classroom. However, there is a lot more potential to gain from the modernization of course content. Education is still too often a one-way street, where students are obligated to process the course content without being able to provide much challenge or activity. This also does not allow for any dialogue to take place between students and teachers concerning feedback and improvement of the material itself.

Technological constraints in current iterations of educational software do not allow this co-creation discourse easily. Material being locked to specific versions of proprietary software is just one of the many problems teachers might encounter when trying to apply this concept in real life.

By utilizing interactive tools and applications, the teacher can engage the students more directly.

By building on modern, open standards, the Open Weblides project **OpenWeblides2017** aims to provide a platform that solves these problems. It creates a user-friendly environment where teachers can create courses based on open source technologies and standards, and it allows them to apply the co-creation narrative easily. This also enables users to share their material not just with their immediate environment but with a much broader educational audience.

0.2 Problem statement

Uit je probleemstelling moet duidelijk zijn dat je onderzoek een meerwaarde heeft voor een concrete doelgroep. De doelgroep moet goed gedefinieerd en afgelijnd zijn. Doelgroepen als “bedrijven,” “KMO’s,” systeembeheerders, enz. zijn nog te vaag. Als je een lijstje kan maken van de personen/organisaties die een meerwaarde zullen vinden in deze bachelorproef (dit is eigenlijk je steekproefkader), dan is dat een indicatie dat de doelgroep goed gedefinieerd is. Dit kan een enkel bedrijf zijn of zelfs één persoon (je co-promotor/opdrachtgever).

0.3 Research question

Wees zo concreet mogelijk bij het formuleren van je onderzoeksvraag. Een onderzoeksvraag is trouwens iets waar nog niemand op dit moment een antwoord heeft (voor zover je kan nagaan). Het opzoeken van bestaande informatie (bv. “welke tools bestaan er voor deze toepassing?”) is dus geen onderzoeksvraag. Je kan de onderzoeksvraag verder specificeren in deelvragen. Bv. als je onderzoek gaat over performantiemetingen, dan

0.4 Research goal

Wat is het beoogde resultaat van je bachelorproef? Wat zijn de criteria voor succes? Beschrijf die zo concreet mogelijk.

0.5 Thesis objective

De rest van deze bachelorproef is als volgt opgebouwd:

In Hoofdstuk 1 wordt een overzicht gegeven van de stand van zaken binnen het onderzoeksdomein, op basis van een literatuurstudie.

In Hoofdstuk ?? wordt de methodologie toegelicht en worden de gebruikte onderzoekstechnieken besproken om een antwoord te kunnen formuleren op de onderzoeksvragen.

In Hoofdstuk ??, tenslotte, wordt de conclusie gegeven en een antwoord geformuleerd op de onderzoeksvragen. Daarbij wordt ook een aanzet gegeven voor toekomstig onderzoek binnen dit domein.

1. State of the Art

Dit hoofdstuk bevat je literatuurstudie. De inhoud gaat verder op de inleiding, maar zal het onderwerp van de bachelorproef **diepgaand** uitspitten. De bedoeling is dat de lezer na lezing van dit hoofdstuk helemaal op de hoogte is van de huidige stand van zaken (state-of-the-art) in het onderzoeksdomein. Iemand die niet vertrouwd is met het onderwerp, weet er nu voldoende om de rest van het verhaal te kunnen volgen, zonder dat die er nog andere informatie moet over opzoeken (**Pollefliet2011**).

Je verwijst bij elke bewering die je doet, vakterm die je introduceert, enz. naar je bronnen. In \LaTeX kan dat met het commando `\textcite{}` of `\autocite{}`. Als argument van het commando geef je de “sleutel” van een “record” in een bibliografische databank in het Bib \TeX -formaat (een tekstbestand). Als je expliciet naar de auteur verwijst in de zin, gebruik je `\textcite{}`. Soms wil je de auteur niet expliciet vernoemen, dan gebruik je `\autocite{}`. In de volgende paragraaf een voorbeeld van elk.

Knuth1998 schreef een van de standaardwerken over sorteer- en zoekalgoritmen. Experts zijn het erover eens dat cloud computing een interessante opportuniteit vormen, zowel voor gebruikers als voor dienstverleners op vlak van informatietechnologie (**Creeger2009**).

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2. Methodologie

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3. Conclusie

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A. Research proposal

The subject of this thesis is based upon a research proposal that was graded by the promotor in advance. This proposal has been included as an attachment.

A.1 Introduction

The **OpenWebslides** project provides a user-friendly platform to collaborate on webslides - slides made with modern web technologies such as HTML, CSS and JavaScript. One of the core features this application provides is *co-creation*. The co-creation aspect manifests itself in several forms within the application; annotations on slides and a change suggesting system resembling GitHub's pull request feature are the main mechanisms. Because of the inherent social nature of co-creation, a basic notifications feed was also implemented. This feed is tailored to the user, and reflects the most recent changes, additions and comments relevant to the slide decks the user is interested in.

However, at the moment the functionality implemented in the system contains only the bare necessities. The module will be expanded in the future, and doing so requires a structural and conceptual rethinking of how the notifications are generated, stored and queried. The size of the dataset is also expected to grow linearly with user activity, therefore scalability is a requirement as well.

This paper has two research questions.

1. What frameworks and software packages currently exist in the industry to store structured non-relational graph or document data?
2. How is the social graph provided by the Open Webslides' notification feed structured

and how is this data consumed?

Answering these questions is paramount for the final section of the paper, which describes a data storage mechanism that performs well given the functional requirements of the project's data flow.

A.2 Use case

This thesis is a study of NoSQL data storage techniques applied to the **OpenWebslides** project. The online, interactive platform that the project provides includes a list of notifications in reverse chronological order, tailored to the user. This feature is called the *social feed*. It enumerates the most recent social activity on the platform. For example, if a user updates a slide deck, the user's friends would be able to find a change notification in their respective social feeds.

From the perspective of the application code that generates the social feed, the user, slide deck and notification should be considered separate entities. The notification itself has relations to the other entities: the author (the *subject*), the slide deck (the *object*), along with the *predicate* property that provides information on what operation was performed (for example creating or updating a slide deck).

This data model is also characterized by the *write-once read-many* nature of the information; once the notification has been generated, it does not need to be modified again. It will also only be queried in a very specific way: the application server will always attempt to retrieve the most recent notifications starting from the user entity. This principle is an important aspect to take into consideration in the choice of data storage mechanism.

A.3 State-of-the-art

In current literature, studies such as **Moniruzzaman2013**, **NayakPoriyaPoojary2003** and **HammesMederoMitchell2014** have already analyzed the disparity between traditional relational database systems and NoSQL stores. However, the conceptual and technical difference between these data storage models will not be scrutinized any further, since this paper presents a data storage solution applied to the social notification feed of the **OpenWebslides** project.

There are already many existing free and commercial products for the storage of NoSQL data, such as Redis (**Redis**), CouchDB (**CouchDB**), MongoDB (**MongoDB**) and Neo4j (**Neo4j**). Finding the right database model for this use case (section A.2) is one of the hurdles this paper intends to handle. **Zhao2015** describes the development of a messaging system for astrophysical transient event notifications. Part of this paper is a qualitative comparison between document-based NoSQL storage solutions fit for this particular use case. We expect this paper to provide a solid base of reasoning in order to find a scalable and efficient solution for resolving similar computational challenges.

The goal of this paper is to provide a performant, scalable and maintainable data storage schema for the **OpenWebslides** platform, regarding the linked social graph that powers the *Social Feed* functionality present in the platform.

A.4 Methodology

First, a range of industry-standard NoSQL database management systems such as MongoDB (**MongoDB**), HBase (**HBase**) and Neo4j (**Neo4j**) will be qualitatively analyzed. Three of the five types of NoSQL database types (**NayakPoriyaPoojary2003**) will be included in the study: column-oriented, document based and graph databases. Criteria for comparison include how the database management system concretely stores its data on disk, the query format and specific programming language bindings. Another important aspect is the distributed nature of many NoSQL databases. Using Brewer's conjecture (**Brewer2002**) – often called the CAP theorem – the existing types of data storage systems will be examined and summarized. There is also a practical factor present in the research; this includes the license of the project, its active maintainability and future prospects. Common types of NoSQL databases include key-value store, column-oriented, document store and graph databases (**NayakPoriyaPoojary2003**). This paper will provide a short introduction to these types, before proceeding with the type that fits our use case the most.

Second, the data model specific to the Open Webslides project will be examined. We will start from the data model that is already implemented in the current iteration of the platform. At the time of writing, the existing base implementation of the social notification feed only contains two types of notifications. This paper will try to extrapolate this concept into a more generalized, abstract system in which developers can easily plug additional notification types. The physical properties of the data model will also be taken into account: the data will be written to the data storage only once, but read many times. It is also highly interlinked information, as a notification will always relate to one or more users as a subject, and a target object as well – most likely a slide deck or collection of slide decks. These links need to be maintained, and efficiently reconstructed when queried.

Finally, a sample dataset will be constructed using the aforementioned detailed analysis. Empirical testing will be conducted against multiple database management systems, and the results will be summarized and interpreted. Various information flows will be tested; however, the most important process remains efficiently querying the stored data.

Using the comparative study of storage engines, data model analysis and the empirical results an implementation plan will be constructed. This plan will serve as a recommendation for future development.

A.5 Expected results and conclusions

The NoSQL ecosystem, unlike relational databases, is headed towards specialization, so different solutions are headed in different directions (**Maroo2013**). In this paper, we expect

to find one type of NoSQL database that is a better fit for the Open Weblides use case, in clear contrast with the other types of storage engines. Due to the inherently highly interlinked nature of the stored data, we suspect a graph-based database management system to provide most advantages, and generally the most performant experience.

This expectation is amplified by the availability and good community support of Ruby bindings to the most popular graph database management systems.

Since the platform being discussed only caters to a small to medium user base, we do not expect the need to scale horizontally beyond one instance. However, the vertical scalability is still a topic for discussion, and we expect to determine the computational order of magnitude in order to efficiently query the given dataset during this study.

Finally, the implementation plan should describe a concrete roadmap, stretching over a development period with a baseline expectation of one to three months. Roll-out of this mechanism should also be included in this plan.

We also expect that this thesis will provide a good reference to a further stable, scalable and extendable implementation of the *social feed* feature in the **OpenWeblides** project as outlined in section A.2.