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Mario de Bruin
Manager ICT
OTTO Work Force

OTTO Work Force gains high availability with XenApp hosted on XenServer

OTTO Work Force was founded in 2000 and has become a market leader in international recruitment with annual revenue of almost 100 million Euros. OTTO Work Force is a trendsetter in properly selecting, housing, educating, paying and guiding immigrant workers from Middle and Eastern Europe. The company employs 150 people with numerous nationalities at headquarters in Venray in the Netherlands. OTTO has offices in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and England.

The challenge – Improve business continuity and scalability

The strategy at Otto Work Force always had been to support local sites with local IT staff. During the growth of the company, IT services became vital for providing continued services to employees and customers, and this strategy of local IT needed to be changed to build a scalable infrastructure with high availability. “The temporary agency market is very dynamic. The complete logistics, from housing and transportation of employees to planning, are managed with IT applications,” said Mario de Bruin, manager ICT at OTTO Work Force. “We needed to renew the planning system and buy new servers and licenses for it. But this new environment would also have increased the workload of the IT staff. This actually provided the business case for going for virtualization. Instead, we decided to centralize and standardize systems and applications to drastically improve application availability. In addition, such a solution would create the necessary flexibility to add or remove remote offices very easily. All this had to be easy to administer and maintain by our small IT staff.”



Implementing Citrix XenApp hosted on Citrix XenServer

OTTO Work Force already used one server running an earlier version of Citrix® XenApp™ to deliver applications to remote locations. The organization asked Itvise, a Platinum Citrix Solution Advisor, to scale up the existing Citrix server and provide a project proposal for the foundation of a stable and flexible network. After approval, Itvise was also given responsibility for the delivery of all the systems, management of the project and implementation of the new environment.

Key benefits

- Drastically improves application availability and business continuity
- Creates flexibility to open or close offices very rapidly
- Achieves high customer satisfaction thanks to efficient employee management
- Consolidates servers and reduces future investments for new servers
- Same IT staff can administer more servers and applications

Now, four Microsoft® Windows Server® 2003 workloads, each with a load-balanced Citrix® XenApp™, Enterprise Edition server, are virtualized on three HP BL460c G1 blade servers using Citrix® XenServer™. In addition, two Microsoft SQL Server® databases are hosted on the XenServer infrastructure and a NetApp™ FAS2050 storage area network provides storage for the workloads and company data.

Customer support during the day, night and weekend

The planning system is business critical for the organization. “Our customers request temporary employees with very short notice. Sometimes they need 60 employees today, 80 tomorrow and 40 next week to handle changing demands. A customer may even call at night or in the weekend to request additional personnel capacity,” added de Bruin. “The Citrix solutions enable guaranteed access to our Rostar planning application, so we know where our temporary employees live, where they need to go and at what time they need to be there. We can arrange transportation and facilities for staying overnight. Punctual delivery of temporary employees to customers benefits not only the customer but also the employee.”

The organization recently had a problem when one physical server went down, also taking down its workloads, including the business-critical planning application Rostar. “A member of the board overheard a discussion in our restaurant about the problem and came to ask why they weren’t informed,” continued de Bruin. “We did not inform the management about this problem because the end users did not notice there was a problem—the redundant Citrix environment simply took over the failing system and the load was automatically balanced between the running workloads.”

At any time, OTTO Work Force has more than 3,000 temporary employees and processes the administration of 100,000 manhours of work each week. On a yearly basis, the organization employs 10,000 people. “The performance demands of our applications are heavy, especially every Friday when planning for the next week is processed and finished,” continued de Bruin. “The performance of our completely virtualized environment is outstanding, even during peak hours. Virtualizing XenApp on top of XenServer makes sense because it adds live server migration with XenMotion to the XenApp server farm. We can move a running XenApp server to different hardware for maintenance reasons without users noticing this transfer.”

Creating a flexible, scalable business without complexity

OTTO Work Force virtualized the database server running Microsoft Dynamics®, a CRM application, during the process and the virtual environment even has room for future growth without buying new physical servers. In addition, XenServer eliminates the need for a Dynamics fallback server, and is also used for creating SAP® test servers and SAP development servers on the fly by cloning the running production server.

One of the goals of the new virtualized environment was to consolidate IT so that the two system administrators needed to spend as little time as possible on operational system administration. De Bruin explained, “We consolidated miscellaneous local and central servers onto one box containing storage and one box containing blades. System administration has become much simpler after introducing the virtual environment. All administration tasks for all server blades and virtual machines can be done from one easy-to-use dashboard. Citrix XenServer adds flexibility from a server and workload point of view.

Meanwhile, XenApp creates the necessary flexibility from an application standpoint. OTTO Work Force often opens a new office or closes an office depending on developments in the market. XenApp makes it very easy to do. After switching on thin clients and a router at the remote location, the office is up and running as the organization recently proved when opening a new office in the Czech Republic, which only took a few days.

Future plans

OTTO Work Force has only completed the first phase in an ongoing process of consolidation. This year the company will migrate its personnel and recruitment application, Paris, which runs in Poland, to the XenServer infrastructure in the Netherlands. In addition, the SAP and BlackBerry® servers will be virtualized on XenServer.

Applications delivered

- Microsoft Office 2007
- SAP GUI 7.10
- Parallax Rostar Flex – employee planning database application
- Microsoft Dynamics – customer relationship management solution

Networking environment

- Citrix XenApp, Enterprise Edition virtualized on Citrix XenServer
- Microsoft Windows Server 2003 running on three HP BL460c G1 servers
- Microsoft SQL Server workloads virtualized on XenServer
- NetApp FAS2050 SAN

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