HassiaGruppe embraces Converged Infrastructure to slash energy costs and transform IT capabilities

"We can expand the IT infrastructure in a way which was not possible before giving us the ability to scale the solution from the data center to remote offices. In terms of IT infrastructure, it means we don't need to do too much. We can concentrate on software and configuration issues."

—Johannes Schneider, managing director of Infrastructure, Ita Vero

Objective
Create a secure failover process to ensure business continuity while reducing the cost of IT infrastructure

Approach
Discussed converged infrastructure solution with HP, HassiaGruppe's long-term IT supplier, following news that SAN Virtualization Services Platform was to be discontinued

IT improvements
• Automated failover processes, ensuring faster response times and improving continuity of business critical operations
• Simplified management of IT infrastructure, enabling IT staff to take on more value-added project work, supporting revenue-generating projects

Business benefits
• Improved data center efficiency reducing energy costs by 30 percent
• Created scalable infrastructure capable of servicing international growth

HassiaGruppe is a fifth-generation family business, based in Bad Vilbel, near Frankfurt, Germany. It produces approximately one billion bottles of mineral water and soft drinks each year, sold across a number of brands.

The business has traditionally focused on the domestic market but it is becoming increasingly international with the Rosbacher and Lichtenauer water brands now being marketed in Asia. Recent years have seen HassiaGruppe acquire smaller, local bottling plants in Germany; international acquisition is part of the longer term strategy.

HassiaGruppe's production process is highly regulated, both by the German government and the company's own quality requirements. Every bottle is given a unique code, every batch is numbered to help track and trace problems should they arise. The central warehouse, storing up to 40,000 pallets, is fully automated with orders picked and packed by robots. A second warehouse handles 20,000 pallets.

"It is a very demanding process," says Johannes Schneider, managing director of Infrastructure at Ita Vero, a HassiaGruppe IT subsidiary. "We need to know where every bottle comes from and where it is going. Problems are rare, but when they come, they come out of the blue."

This places a tremendous strain on HassiaGruppe's IT infrastructure. "The smooth running of our production and warehousing operations is critical. We can't afford disruptions," says Schneider.

Simplifying the management of IT infrastructure

The Ita Vero subsidiary was created to improve cost transparency and efficiency for HassiaGruppe. Schneider is one of a team of four, responsible for service and delivery to seven locations and 1,000 HassiaGruppe IT users: "We don't have time to build racks or lay cable. A converged infrastructure would make it possible for us to do more. It means we could concentrate on software and configuration."

Schneider was keen to virtualize the IT environment, lowering the cost of the IT infrastructure and pushing his team into more value-added services. He says he is not afraid of being bold: "A traditional family-run business and innovation are not contradictions."

Rising energy costs were also a major factor in opting out of a physical environment, he says: "Electricity costs are going up, even for companies such as ours that use a lot and get a good rate from suppliers. We did the math and estimated we could make a 30 percent saving on our energy costs moving to a virtualized environment."

The move to virtualization did not come about as planned. HassiaGruppe is a long term HP customer, from printers to servers. Schneider had bought the HP SAN Virtualization Services Platform (SVSP), only to learn one year after taking the product that it was to be discontinued. However, the blow was softened by excellent work from the local HP account team. "They knew how critical this was to us. The local HP team immediately got to work finding a solution," he says.

The priority, he explains, was an automated failover process: "We don't have the resources to restart or copy over. A failover can only last 5-10 minutes, maximum. We haven't the time to manually intervene."

Several competitor options were considered but nothing matched the HP P4500 LeftHand Storage System failover performance, supported by automatic deduplication from HP StoreOnce Backup Systems. The alternatives, says Schneider, were either too expensive or lacked the features of the HP solution: "HP LeftHand could do all that we needed, with the best price: performance ratio."

The P4500 LeftHand Storage System is optimized for virtualized environments with VMware ESX integration, and offers HassiaGruppe continuous data availability to users and applications to meet changing demand. It can scale capacity and performance to match HassiaGruppe's business growth, and eliminates single points of failure. It is also easy to set up: HP lab tests claim just 20 minutes from out-of-the-box to configuration, making it particularly attractive for Schneider's hard-pressed team.

An additional benefit, says Schneider, is that HP LeftHand connects using iSCSI rather than a Fibre Channel: "Fibre Channel is great when it works, but if not, you need someone who knows how to fix and maintain it. Businesses of our size just don't have the resources to do that or the budget to bring people in. iSCSI meant we could eliminate the need for Fibre Channel."

Energy consumption cut by one third

Schneider says the converged infrastructure is already delivering against his energy saving targets. "We're making the 30 percent savings as calculated, and we reckon we will save a further 10-15 percent in the next phase. This allows us to put solid energy data into our planning calculations; we know how much capacity we need and how much energy this requires. We can work out the cost of say a rack reduction, which means for the first time we can contribute accurate figures to growth or acquisition planning."

The energy cost saving is the immediate, obvious benefit. What Schneider and his team do with the time savings is harder to quantify. "We could run the converged infrastructure with just one or two people, which means we have to be more proactive in our approach to work. We're using the time to examine ways of optimizing network monitoring and planning new virtualization environments. We're mapping processes, from the helpdesk to automation of the warehouse, looking at ways to make the business more efficient. It's the kind of work that doesn't get seen by anyone else in the business."

He admits that "no one pays us for this work, or thanks us," and that is changing the nature of the IT function. "As a subsidiary of the core business, our aim is to lower the cost of managing the IT infrastructure, but this can't be the only objective. We want to virtualize everything but we also need to be more marketing-led," says Schneider. "We need to demonstrate how we can add value to the business."

For more information

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