

Hewlett Packard Enterprise

Technology on the pulse of fashion

ACA delivers business-critical applications to fashion retailers with HPE Helion Cloud solutions

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– Patrick van den Bosch, Cloud and Technology Manager, ACA Fashion Software



Objective

Build a flexible platform to simplify delivery of retail applications while eliminating hardware headaches.

Approach

Engaged with the Hewlett Packard Enterprise Helion team to build a cloud-based application delivery model that provides competitive pricing, higher service levels, and improved scalability.

IT Matters

- Enables 10-fold faster deployments of compute resources and storage capacity
- Decreases complexity at customer sites, reducing IT management hours by 25 percent
- Boosts availability for retail customers by eliminating single points of failure

Business Matters

- Increases business competitiveness and reach, lowering customer cost by 10–20 percent
- Delivers an integrated server, storage, network, and software solution from a single vendor
- Enables a predictable, manageable financial model for future growth

Championing technology solutions that keep European fashion retailers at the top of their game, [ACA Fashion Software](#) delivers specialized industry applications to more than 1,000 customers from its headquarters in The Netherlands. Supporting a broad customer base with various hardware configurations was a challenge ACA wanted to overcome. By building a cloud-based application delivery model with HPE Helion CloudSystem, ACA is delivering higher service levels at a lower price while realizing its own IT efficiencies.

Invisible technology

Operating a retail business in today's economy can be deceptively complicated. No matter what you're selling, and regardless of the type of shopping experience you're creating, just about every retailer today relies on point-of-sale (POS) systems and a series of back-room business applications. The trick is making it all invisible to the customer.

To deliver the kinds of immersive, technology-enabled shopping experiences that keep customers coming back, fashion retailers and manufacturers in Europe rely on solutions from ACA Fashion Software.

Providing integrated software for POS information, inventory, customer management, pricing, stocking, and replenishment, ACA Fashion Software has more than 1,000 customers in Sweden, Portugal, Belgium, Germany, France, and of course, its home country: The Netherlands.

Last year's model

Delivering back-office applications used to mean bundling hardware with its applications. It was a fine model for its day, but one with drawbacks. "The server side of the solution could get tricky," explains Patrick van den Bosch, Cloud and Technology Manager for ACA Fashion Software. "Customers are all looking for a deal; they all want to try to save money by using their own server, networking, or storage configuration, and many of them have system administrators with their own recommendations."

The end result could be both confusing and expensive for the customer, especially if those back-office servers needed maintenance or updating. "In retail, every minute your systems are offline is a minute you're basically out of business," van den Bosch says.

That is why ACA Fashion Software started looking for ways to simplify its XPRT and WinStore software solutions by eliminating the ambiguity of various hardware choices.

Constructing a cloud

"We started looking at cloud solutions a few years ago," van den Bosch says. "In the beginning it was a bit of a gamble for us, but we knew we were able to offer our customers a product that was totally flexible, scalable, and available. Our goal was to offer all the benefits of an enterprise solution while keeping startup costs to a minimum."

Because ACA Fashion Software had built its previous solution on HPE ProLiant servers—both at customer sites and its own data center—van den Bosch and team chose the HPE Helion portfolio of hybrid cloud products to deliver its retail solution.

Based on HPE Converged Infrastructure portfolio hardware—HPE ProLiant BL460 Server Blades in an HPE BladeSystem c7000 Enclosure, HPE 3PAR F400 Storage, and HPE Virtual Connect FlexFabric—the team built its own cloud environment using HPE CloudSystem Enterprise technology.

An integrated solution

"We talked to HPE first, as we know their products, and they provided the whole range of hardware and software we needed from a simple POS system to a cloud solution," says van den Bosch. "We didn't look much at other competitors, because we've had good experiences with HPE, and we know its products well—and we followed HPE's advice on what was required to run HPE Helion CloudSystem."

For ACA Fashion Software, having the entire system come from a single vendor is a value proposition in and of itself. “By purchasing the entire system from HPE, I knew I would have a working product that is certified,” says van den Bosch. “It’s better to have one vendor and one solution: it’s tested and proven, and if there are any problems there is a single point of contact to go to for support.

“Instead of spending a long time to build our own solution—that may or may not be compatible—with HPE we have a working solution out of the box,” says van den Bosch. “We worked together with HPE to make the move to HPE CloudSystem, including HPE helping us to calculate the business case.”

HPE also provides ACA 24x7 support with a four-hour response time via its Support Plus 24 service, which is delivered under a five-year contract. With direct access to the HPE Helion Cloud support team, ACA is able to get expert advice when its systems engineers have questions that need to be answered.

Simplicity reigns supreme

The solution made good on its promise of scalability, flexibility, and simplicity. “Many of our customers are gifted retailers, but aren’t interested in becoming IT experts,” van den Bosch says. “The HPE Helion Cloud solution we offer means our customer gets to replace a server room with a desktop computer, and trade upfront hardware costs and maintenance for a monthly fee. It’s been an amazingly popular service.”

Aside from eliminating complexity from the customer’s environment and reducing the headaches of hardware upgrades and unplanned downtime, customers are increasingly moving to the cloud for financial reasons, too.

Saving customers 10–20%

The cloud infrastructure’s flexibility has helped to reduce the overall cost of IT for ACA’s customers. “In the past we tended to overprovision storage, but in the cloud, you only use and pay for what you need,” says van den Bosch. ACA’s customers now typically spend anything between €139 and €950 each month for the cloud solution, including hardware, software, and support.

“Moving to the cloud means their overall costs are between 10–20 percent cheaper, depending on the solution,” says van den Bosch. “For retail customers, every euro counts—if they can save €200 a month, that is a lot of money for them.”

Another contributor to cost savings is HPE 3PAR Thin Suite, a toolset that helps ACA to increase the efficiency of its storage system and maximize capacity without having to overprovision.

10-fold faster deployments

Simplifying solutions for its customers has also improved efficiency in ACA’s own offices. When customers need to grow their environment by adding servers or storage capacity, van den Bosch and team can deliver the resources faster and with less disruption to business.

“Our customers tend to have quite a lot of changes in their requirements—they open and close businesses, and they have more data every month,” says van den Bosch. “Before, we had to visit the customer to add new hardware, which would take up to two weeks, including ordering the equipment, but now with our HPE CloudSystem environment we can make the changes from beginning to end in a single business day.”

Case study

ACA Fashion
Software

Industry

Software as a Service,
Service Provider

Customer at a glance

HPE Helion Cloud solution

- Private cloud

Hardware

- HPE CloudSystem Matrix 7.3.0
- HPE Virtual Connect FlexFabric 10Gb/24-port Module
- HPE BladeSystem c7000 Enclosure
- HPE ProLiant BL460c Server Blades
- HPE ProLiant DL360 Servers
- HPE 3PAR F400 Storage
- HPE 3PAR Service Processor
- HPE 5400 zl Switch Series

Software

- HPE Matrix Operating Environment
- HPE 3PAR Thin Suite

HPE services

- HPE CloudSystem installation and startup services
- HPE Support Plus 24

The new way of deploying compute resources, adding storage capacity, and otherwise modifying customer environments is benefitting ACA itself. “Since we spend less time making site visits and manually modifying our customers’ infrastructures, we’re spending 25 percent less time managing hardware. That’s time our IT team can use to develop new products and services for the future,” van den Bosch relates.

A certified hit

“We’ve been really surprised at how fast our cloud solution has taken off,” van den Bosch explains. “Already, more than 20 percent of our customers have taken advantage of our new cloud-based product. What this shows us is that people are ready to make the move to the cloud, because it simplifies their business while offering the kind of reliability that only major retailers can achieve,” van den Bosch says.

As it continues to champion new solutions for its customers, ACA Fashion Software is researching the delivery of its POS solutions from the cloud as well. Again, van den Bosch is looking to HPE. “We want to bring the same level of reliability and simplicity of our back-office products to POS,” explains van den Bosch. “If you’re a retail shop, and you can’t sell anything because your registers are down, you’re basically out of business. Our cloud-based HPE solution will bring guaranteed uptime for POS systems, and that’s where we’re headed in the near future.”

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