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COMLINE AG speeds up the migration of SMEs to the cloud

IT service provider boosts its innovative profile with HPE Cloud Service Automation

Objective
Build a secure and highly automated hybrid cloud architecture to deliver IT services to SMEs throughout Germany from an advanced data centre

Approach
Asked employees to identify popular customer services and service automation opportunities, and assessed established providers of cloud management platforms

IT Matters
- Provides an open, secure and fully integrated cloud solution, delivering IT services to SMEs

- Generates a comprehensive high availability storage capability, safeguarding service delivery and business continuity

- Delivers a highly flexible self-service portal, supporting a multi-tenanted environment

- Offers all-embracing IT automation and flexible template management, lowering error rates substantial

Business Matters
- Increases the service offerings from 12 to 41, satisfying market requirements

- Lowers service delivery times from 40 to eight minutes, enhancing customer satisfaction

- Boosts employee productivity by 80 per cent, delivering a return on investment in less than one year

- Reduces the cost of IT resources, meeting the needs of a highly competitive market

COMLINE AG has accelerated service delivery times substantially at its data centre with HPE Helion CloudSystem and HPE Cloud Service Automation. Productivity at the company has increased by 80 per cent due to a high degree of automation, which leads to fewer errors and improved customer service. The project achieved a return on investment in less than a year.

Challenge

New IT service delivery model
Hamburg-based COMLINE AG, an innovative IT services provider, unites the worlds of processes, applications and infrastructure through various IT delivery models, creating customised, standards-based solutions.

"We abandoned volume IT business a long time ago. We increasingly concentrate on issues that plague CIOs in today's small and medium enterprises (SMEs)," explains Ralf Schäfer, head of Infrastructure Solutions, Operations and Data Centre Consulting COMLINE AG. "CIOs have to juggle business requirements, legacy application migrations, never-ending data growth and new IT service delivery models in data centres. We support this balancing act."

> "The project is a complete success. We've raised employee productivity by up to 80 per cent and achieved a return on investment in less than a year."
>
> — Ralf Schäfer, head of Infrastructure Solutions, Operations and Data Centre Consulting, COMLINE AG

COMLINE therefore became increasingly attracted to data centre evolution. According to Schäfer, only around 40 to 50 per cent of all SMEs' systems are virtualised and there is a relatively low degree of IT automation. But building hybrid cloud architectures is just the beginning. "As a pioneer, we wanted to create a cloud for SMEs in Germany. A cloud that was secure, easy to use, highly automated and competitively priced," continues Schäfer.

He challenged his employees to find out which services COMLINE's outsourcing customers frequently demanded in terms of provisioning, administration and change management. He also asked them to identify opportunities to automate these services. The outcome was a catalogue of twelve services, which forms around 80 per cent of internal expenditure.

COMLINE then posed several questions: How do we automate these services? Which platforms and architectures are suitable? Which tools are available and what suppliers should we consider?

"Trust in a supplier is the most important factor. That's why we chose Hewlett Packard Enterprise. With HPE at our side, we knew we had a partner who could successfully achieve this data centre evolution," says Schäfer.

Solution

Delivering flexibility
When COMLINE experts compared solutions, HPE Cloud Service Automation scored very highly technically as an open, expandable solution.

"HPE Cloud Service Automation provides a high degree of flexibility when connected to external systems," declares Schäfer. "We especially admired the self-service portal interface, which supports multiple clients. We also found HPE Operations Orchestration software fantastic. Employees now swiftly develop, set up, execute and document automated workflows."

COMLINE did, however, have one concern about the HPE Operations Orchestration software: the templates were too inflexible and proprietary. "We consulted with HPE to find a template solution," reveals Schäfer.

The answer came from US-based HPE developers working on open technology to support OpenStack cloud software. COMLINE was one of HPE's first customers to experience the benefits of this development.

"Unfortunately, no-one in Germany had the right expertise to implement the solution. We therefore launched an innovative project which developed into a research venture," states Schäfer. "This move was worthwhile as we now have highly flexible template management, making work much easier."

About a year ago, the COMLINE Cloud for SMEs, which comprises HPE Helion CloudSystem, an HPE 3PAR StoreServ Disk Storage System and HPE Cloud Service Automation software, went live. The company consequently increased the number of services to outsourcing customers from 12 to 41 and all services are automated through the self-service portal.

COMLINE markets services to different customer target groups: end-users, managers, IT departments and purchasers. Each target group uses specific services that are clustered into service 'shopping baskets', a concept that COMLINE created with pilot customers such as GESOBAU AG, a leading housing association in Berlin. COMLINE mapped all processes in HPE Operations Orchestration software and refined the procedures during testing.

The workflows are broadly divided into three categories: self-service, infrastructure and other. Target groups for self-service processes such as user management are assigned to end-users. To help users with very little computer literacy, the portal design is simple. Release processes on the portal allow end-users to issue orders, which are then released by a relevant responsible person.

Faster service performance
COMLINE processes received orders immediately using HPE Operations Orchestration software. The application creates the requested user and group accounts, arranges releases, informs employees about mobile end device orders and opens change tickets to ensure new employees, for example, receive a PC or notebook.

These services save customers an enormous amount of time. According to Schäfer, services such as creating a user account or resetting a password now take eight minutes rather than 40 minutes. Process costs to purchase IT resources such as virtual servers have fallen too.

Instead of drafting an elaborate quotation, this service is now only a click away. For customers' IT departments, COMLINE created a 'shopping basket' of infrastructure services by providing sufficient internet bandwidth and VPN tunnel connections between individual sites and the systems at its data centre. Subscriptions to services such as Windows® and other operating systems, as well as dial-up VPN clients, are integrated into the customer's infrastructure automatically.

Moreover, customers can choose from an extensive catalogue of systems, which they lease as virtual systems. The entire delivery process from creating a virtual machine, to allocating CPU, RAM, disk space and data backup, as well as network setup, is fully automated.

The services and infrastructure are also provided as a 'shopping basket'. Customers have an option to order support services from a catalogue for a new or existing system. Accordingly, the portal offers individuals various performance features, support periods and response times as well as any price changes. Finally, COMLINE has created a hardware shopping basket with standard products, which customers order through the portal at agreed prices.

Benefits

Up to 80 per cent more productive
COMLINE currently introduces all new outsourcing customers to the new cloud platform while existing customers are switching over to reap the benefits.

Customer at a glance

Hardware
• HPE Helion CloudSystem

• HPE 3PAR StoreServ Disk Storage System

Software
• HPE Cloud Service Automation

• HPE Operations Orchestration

"HPE Cloud Service Automation offers a fresh opportunity for outsourcing amongst SMEs. Our growth in the market over the first few months has increased strongly as the platform helps us to follow the cost of services from nearshore or offshore IT service providers. In addition, there's the added benefit of retaining a data centre in Germany."

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"The project is a complete success," says Schäfer. "We've raised employee productivity by up to 80 per cent and achieved a return on investment in less than a year."

Thanks to the high degree of automation, employees now take on more demanding tasks, leading to job profile changes. Administrators have become operation orchestrators, for example. "This makes work much more appealing to our employees, helping us to attract the cream of the crop," says Schäfer.

Reduced error rates is another major benefit of the high degree of automation. Following quality assurance, errors within services have fallen as the HPE Operations Orchestration software workflow allocates parameters between templates and the administrator does not have to constantly make manual inputs. The cloud platform also accelerates audit documentation.

Schäfer adds; "HPE Cloud Service Automation offers a fresh opportunity for outsourcing amongst SMEs. Our growth in the market over the first few months has increased strongly as the platform helps us to follow the cost of services from nearshore or offshore IT service providers."

In addition, there's the added benefit of retaining a data centre in Germany. Our strategic decision to set up a cloud infrastructure has positioned the company strongly as an innovation partner in IT-based processes and technologies."

Finally, COMLINE has helped both its outsourcing customers and other SMEs to migrate to the cloud. Thanks to a strategic partnership with HPE, both companies are capitalising on HPE Cloud Service Automation for SMEs.

"As an early adopter of automated cloud infrastructure, we use our experience to help other SMEs migrate to the cloud. By setting up our own platform, our employees have acquired experience that they can draw on to advise others in the future," concludes Schäfer.

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