Hewlett Packard Enterprise

ALPLA improves server uptime and business continuity by centralizing data centers

HPE Technology Services assesses the entire business to develop a five-year IT strategy

Objective
Plan and execute a five-year IT strategy to match global business requirements, centralizing services, improving server and email uptime and establish new, state-of-the-art data centers in two locations

Approach
Sought a supplier to provide a global overview of its IT infrastructure. As a long-time buyer of HPE servers, it sought the advice from HPE Technology Servers

IT Matters
- Identified and prioritized 150 IT issues to be addressed, creating proof-of-concepts for every step of the transformation

- Created always-on access to global email, improving communication and speeding decision making

- Centralized global Microsoft® Exchange server to reduce power, complexity and management costs

- Removed local tape-based backup, securing data storage with a centralized system

- Modernized server fleet, increasing availability meaning greater uptime for business

Business Matters
- Created and executed a five-year IT infrastructure strategy in line with business requirements, securing involvement of C-level management

- Consolidated supplier count, to reduce management costs and business complexity

ALPLA is possibly the biggest company you've never heard of. Its products can be found in almost every household in the developed world and it generated sales of €2.84 billion in 2011. Yet it is hardly a household name.

Challenge

The need for a global overview
The Austrian plastics manufacturer produces packaging solutions for the world's biggest Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) brands, including Coca Cola, Unilever and P&G. From bleach to motor oil, fabric conditioner to ketchup, the chances are ALPLA designs and manufactures the packaging. It has 148 factories in 39 countries and continues to expand, particularly in China and South America.

This global presence coupled with increasingly close ties to its customers (many of which have inhouse ALPLA manufacturing facilities) presents several IT challenges. The business has grown off the back of a decentralized IT infrastructure, with local data centers serving production and logistic facilities all around the world. The result is an infrastructure that is serviced by a mixed bag of suppliers, inconsistent and hard to monitor.

"There is greater availability of systems within the production and supply chain and it is much easier to implement new services. It has matched the IT function with the needs of the ALPLA organization."

— Stefan Berchtold, corporate IT system engineer and project manager, ALPLA

"Standardization is our biggest challenge," says Klaus P. Metzler, CIO and project sponsor, ALPLA. "We needed to identify which services we could centralize – in economic as well as performance terms – and then consolidate."

ALPLA's Corporate IT Systems team of seven (Stefan Berchtold, Matthias Fink, Johann Foedeles, Christian Putz, Daniel Schrom, Stefan Toefferl and Michael Wakolbinger) are responsible for the company's corporate IT systems, including communication, security and network services. With the infrastructure hardware due for replacement (a previous IT strategy was drawn up, inhouse, in 2003), Berchtold says it was evident the business needed to do more than just buy like-for-like replacements, though he was unclear what the new vision would look like: "There was an opportunity to improve our servers and services but who would be able to support us in such a project?"

Needing an overview of all aspects of the IT infrastructure, Berchtold realized he would need to upgrade to a global rather than local partner, ideally one with experience of similar projects. Previously, local specialists served each specialist function – email services, network, Active Directory.

"We knew these wouldn't have the scale to create a global vision within the same time frame," says Berchtold. "That's when we were introduced to Hewlett Packard Enterprise."

HPE was a server supplier to the business, but ALPLA was unaware of its consulting services. Crucially, says Berchtold, HPE was able to provide references. "It's a huge company with global presence – and it had done a similar project with the Austrian Embassies around the world. That we could see this in action made us comfortable allowing HPE to present its case."

Solution

Workshops to clarify business objectives
To gain a complete view of ALPLA's requirements, HPE set about organizing a series of workshops, establishing a five-year IT strategy. "It wasn't that we were blind to the IT challenge," says Berchtold, "but HPE did a great job in bringing us together as an organization. The workshops involved SharePoint services, business intelligence, ERP systems – departments we hadn't necessarily covered in the past. And what did we find out? That we all wanted the same things."

"Previously, IT told the organization which systems they could use. Now business is even more aligned with IT."

The workshops established a long-list of more than 100 topics to be addressed, grouped into 15 themes. The process clarified several objectives:

- Centralize services where possible, consolidate globally

- Improvement in email uptime

- Proactive monitoring of system performance, including regional management of servers

- Consistent helpdesk support

- Secure backup for Business Continuity Management

- Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery requiring new, redundant data centers

- Create new set of Service Level Agreements (SLAs).

"Email is the biggest concern for users. If mail is offline we'll lose a lot of money, it's that simple," says Berchtold. "How much is hard to say, but we need to close a deal, fix a price or make a market intervention at any given moment, anywhere in the world. If email is down it has an impact on our daily operation."

With bringing up Microsoft System Center Operations (SCOM) and HPE Systems Insight Manager we're now able to proactively identify issues in our IT environment and investigate instead of doing stuff reactively.

Local, tape-based backups were also found to be ineffective, leaving business continuity exposed. "We had too many bad experiences," says Berchtold.

"Tapes not being replaced and tapes being not kept in a standardized place. We needed to remove backup from the local plant."

Benefits

Replace, consolidate, centralize
With HPE uncovering the weak points in ALPLA's IT infrastructure, and the findings fed back to management, that pressure, long absent, was now evident. "Doing everything in one go would be too much for us. We needed HPE to put it all together, to have a consolidated view of all domains and a step-by-step project approach to realize the whole program and make sense of the project. This wouldn't have been possible using different specialists for each domain," says Berchtold.

As the project plan was put in place, HPE began work on proof-of-concepts. The first task was to replace and consolidate server hardware at branch locations. In place of 140 local servers, two new, high-availability data centers were built in Austria and Germany, 30km apart, to host centralized services including a Microsoft Exchange server. This solved ALPLA's email issues and provided always-on access to email, calendars and contacts, regardless of device or location.

Customer at a glance

Hardware
- HPE StoreOnce Backup System

Software
- HPE Data Protector

- Microsoft Systems Center Operations Manager 2012

- Microsoft System Center 2007/2012

- Microsoft Exchange 2010

- HPE System Insight Manager

- Microsoft Windows® Server 2008 R2

HPE services
- HPE Technology Consulting Services

- HPE Support Services

- HPE Critical Facility Services

- HPE Microsoft Consulting Services

Our solution partners

Microsoft

In addition to the hardware, HPE Critical Facility Services Experts designed both facilities, including power management, electrical installations, cabling, air conditioning, raised floor, fire detection and extinguishing system as well as a radio-link solution to replicate data between sites.

"Previously, we could only be reactive. We were informed the email was down, we'd investigate and fix," says Berchtold. "Now, with the Microsoft SCOM server we have ongoing monitoring, patching and predictive failure testing."

The whole infrastructure is now monitored by Microsoft SCOM 2012, providing a singular view of operations. The plan is to split by geography, giving ALPLA local visibility in each of its eight regions with HPE providing 'follow the sun' support. HPE backup application, HPE Data Protector, is used to control backups now. Tape has been replaced by HPE disk-based backup with deduplication, HPE StoreOnce Backup. Tape is now being used for a more appropriate job in long-term storage.

One source, simpler to coordinate

Berchtold says HPE helped to define a method and structure to plan and implement the whole transformation program which could have been an overwhelmingly complex process without structuring the tasks in the right way. Having a single point of contact at HPE and clearly defined responsibilities makes it easier to co-ordinate all sub-projects and tasks. "It saves us time and grief – with multiple partners, planning meetings can descend into finger pointing. With HPE, we have everything we needed in one source."

This has resulted in a roadmap of future projects. As next step a concept is in place for a full Unified Communications roll-out, scheduled for 2013, including presence and video. The business is now more secure, more flexible and better able to respond quickly. Proactive monitoring of systems means there is less downtime, server problems can be repaired in hours rather than the 2-3 days of manual work required previously. Updates and software patches are quicker to roll out. "In the past this was a big deal. No more," says Daniel Schrom, head of Corporate IT Systems.

ALPLA's CIO Klaus P. Metzler's summary after project completion: "There is greater availability of systems, within the production and supply chain, and it is much easier and faster to implement new services. It has matched the IT function with the needs of the ALPLA organization."

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