

Case study

Cloud Services at VBH

»We calculated that a cloud service from Fujitsu is about 25 percent cheaper than operating the infrastructure ourselves.«

Oliver Maisch, CIO, VBH Group



Hardware Dealer VBH: "Simply Everything. Everything Simple"

Metal fittings are the business of VBH Group. For more than 35 years, the market leader in the distribution of construction fittings has been supplying manufacturers and builders with everything they need to make and install windows and doors. Today the company is represented in 40 countries with 3,000 employees working in 130 offices. Hence, the organization of global IT is a major factor in their success. VBH used to operate its own data center which served both Germany and its many offices abroad. However, the more its business grew, the more apparent it became for VBH that they just didn't have the personnel and hardware resources needed to keep pace. New IT capacities were required to support the existing and future business in a flexible and reliable way. According to their slogan „Everything simple“, the IT management was supposed to be operated with minimal resources.

Cloud Services for Flexible and Affordable Growth

In order to cut its fixed costs and keep its IT infrastructure flexible for future growth, VBH opted for cloud services instead of expanding its collection of servers. The major argument in favor of the decision was an internal ROI calculation showing that cloud service would be approximately 25 percent cheaper than operating its own IT infrastructure. The fact that VBH also wanted to expand its business to countries such as Italy and Russia was another factor in favor of the agile cloud service. In this case, the company would have had to employ skilled IT people at each site, train them, and invest heavily in local infrastructure. Therefore, VBH opted for the strategy to centralize its worldwide IT and entrust it to the cloud.

IT Infrastructure-as-a-Service from Fujitsu

VBH now obtains its cloud-based server, storage and security services from Fujitsu. Fujitsu's bid was successful thanks to its convincing concept. It allows for the small IT team at VBH to maintain authority over business-critical in-house ERP applications. Fujitsu partner Raber+Märcker is responsible for application management of Dynamics NAV (Navision), Exchange and Web Shop as well as for second-level support, and acts as central contact for VBH. Currently 400 people at the European offices of the wholesaler work with the new infrastructure in the cloud comprising 60 servers. In accordance with the "Pay as you grow" principle, VBH will only have to pay for the capacity it actually needs for growth.

The Customer

Country: Germany, sales worldwide
 Industry: Distribution of construction fittings
 Established: 1975
 Sales: 880 million EUR
 Website: www.vbh.de



The Challenge

Global growth required the VBH Group to update its IT infrastructure. However, expanding its IT landscape with new hardware coupled with opening new offices would have led to much higher fixed costs and a major overhead for IT administration.

The Solution

Fujitsu now operates the server, storage and security systems as cloud services based on PRIMERGY, ETERNUS and NetApp systems. VBH has saved 25 percent of its costs compared to running its own IT operation and has a flexible, scalable solution that is easy to roll out to their offices throughout the world.

Customer Benefits

- 25% cheaper than running its own infrastructure
- Reduced fixed costs: buy services instead of new hardware
- „Pay as you grow“: only pay what you actually need for growth
- Centralization of IT in a secure „trusted cloud“
- More flexibility for growth without the need for more manpower
- Simple connection of new offices in other countries
- Capacity can be expanded at any time
- Freeing up of personnel and financial resources
- Concentration on core business
- Business-critical knowledge remains in house
- Conversion does not impinge on operations
- Standardized services with constant quality

Products and Services

- Server as a Service: 60 virtual servers based on PRIMERGY and VMware
- Storage as a Service based on ETERNUS and NetApp V-Filer
- Backup as a Service: full backup in accordance with service levels
- Security services: anti-spam, anti-virus, Web mail, etc.
- Application management for such ERP applications as Navision, Exchange, WebShop, etc. (handled by Raber+Märcker)
- Citrix XenApp server farm for 400 users with mobile worldwide access (handled by Raber+Märcker)
- Flexible IT infrastructure in the cloud
- Storage systems provided for the migration
- Consulting, design and implementation in close cooperation with Raber+Märcker

Smooth Migration thanks to Virtualization and Service

The fact that VBH already operated the Navision application, plus all the servers it required, on a completely virtualized platform was good preparation for the migration of data from the old computing center to the cloud. All the company’s data was first mirrored onto NetApp storage devices into the cloud in mid-April 2011 while a redundant backup was created in Fujitsu’s new computing center. Doing so rendered it unnecessary to move any hardware. The IT team was able to perform thorough testing before throwing the switch to finally shut down the old infrastructure.

Users did not notice the two-and-a-half month migration process at all in their daily work because the conversion occurred in steps, system by system, location by location in brief half-hour segments. Just a few infrastructure parameters had to be modified, such as the firewall settings, the modification of the IP addresses or the setup of VPN connections. The former servers had a direct connection to the Internet but the cloud solution makes use of secure proxy servers. “There are always challenges in any project of this kind,” says Oliver Maisch, CIO at VBH. “The main thing though, is that the people at Fujitsu and Raber+Märcker react quickly and come up with a good solution. Our experience has been very good.”

Security and Storage as a Service

VBH also reconsidered Web and e-mail security in the course of the project. Whereas formerly a self-operated anti-spam and anti-virus appliance kept junk data at bay, a security service now does duty. All spam administration, virus checks and updates now run through external security service providers. The wholesale company pays no additional licensing fees nor does it need any additional administrative work. Security was just as much of the complete solution as were storage as a service and backup.

Expansion without IT Limits

Currently 400 people in the European VBH offices are working with the cloud services. Further offices in Russia and other countries are expected to be added next year, which will double the number of users to 800. The regular training sessions for staff that purchasing of new systems and connecting them to the existing infrastructure would have necessitated, would have exceeded the time budget disproportionately. Now thanks to the cloud, expanding IT services to the new offices will be possible without any great effort. “What’s more,” says Maisch, “managing hardware is not our core competence. Instead, our competence lies in the business processes behind the hardware.”

Maisch is very comfortable, after one month of live operation, with the level of collaboration with his service providers. “In order to implement a project of this size successfully, chemistry has to exist between the people in charge. It has been our experience that the better the advance planning, the easier it is to implement a project like this.” The VBH CIO recommends taking things step by step. “It is better to convert systems or companies one after the other and then perform thorough testing, instead of trying to do everything at once.”

»Our goal was to free up resources and cut fixed costs for infrastructure. We definitely accomplished that goal with the aid of cloud service from Fujitsu.«

Oliver Maisch, CIO, VBH Group

Partner



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