

Case study

ARA Assistance

»The enhanced efficiency, effectiveness and fault immunity of our new virtualized IT environment with PRIMERGY servers and ETERNUS storage systems clearly outperform our former infrastructure. Now we are able to offer our customers an appreciably higher level of service.«

Christian Jäger, Head of IT, ARA Assistance



Customer management and automobile club

ARA Assistance is typically encountered in the insurance, travel and automobile sector. The comprehensive service portfolio of ARA GmbH – Auto und Reise Assistance (automotive and travel assistance) includes, among others, damage management assistance for insurers over the phone, service management for roadside assistance cover, emergency assistance as well as service management regarding medical and health covers for travels abroad. For this purpose ARA GmbH operates a competence center 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Another important and well-established company within the corporate association and one of the co-partners of ARA GmbH is the German automobile and travel club ARCD Auto- und Reiseclub Deutschland. Founded in 1928, Germany's first automobile and travel club has over 100,000 members nationwide. The membership fee includes an extensive assistance cover that entitles ARCD members to insurance coverage for travels throughout Europe. Last but not least, the third party in this league, the publishing house and market researcher Auto&Reise GmbH – Verlag und Wirtschaftsdienst, publishes the ARCD club magazine "Auto&Reise", a German car and travel magazine.

Significantly fewer concerns with virtualization

These three associated companies are provided with IT services from the data center of the corporate headquarters based in the Franconian town of Bad Windsheim. After in-depth consulting by Fujitsu's SELECT Partner Bechtle, ARA Assistance deliberately opted for virtualization. "Although the achievable time savings through lower administrative overhead represented an undeniable benefit in itself, the decisive incentive that led us to implement a virtualization solution was the fact that our IT staff would have significantly fewer concerns," explains Christian Jäger, Head of IT at ARA Assistance. So far, ARA Assistance had been operating ten servers. However, their maintenance became ever more complex and their operation increasingly risky. In addition, capacity upgrades always involved complex manual interventions. "We are able to achieve immense time savings, especially when making new resources available," Christian Jäger points out. "Installing a new server involves only three mouse clicks now. Before virtualization we had to purchase, install and configure the hardware. What used to require two to three days at times, can now be handled within three to four minutes without interrupting operations, and we benefit from clearly minimized downtime."

The customer

Teamed up with its corporate alliance partners ARCD e.V. and Auto&Reise GmbH, ARA Assistance GmbH provides first-class call center and client management services.



www.ara-assistance.de

The challenge

Enhanced high availability and less administrative effort for the data centers within the corporate alliance

The solution

A VMware virtualization solution on the basis of PRIMERGY servers and ETERNUS storage systems combined with a backup concept relying on the ETERNUS tape library solution and software by Symantec.

The benefit

- Less administrative effort
- Optimal leveraging of hardware resources
- Higher degree of fault immunity
- Lower energy costs due to efficient systems

Products and services

- ESX servers: 3 x PRIMERGY RX300 S6
- Storage systems: 2 x ETERNUS DX90
- Backup server: 1 x PRIMERGY TX300
- Backup server: 1 x ETERNUS LT20
- Backup software: Symantec BackupExec
- Virtualization software: VMware vSphere 4
- Server management: Fujitsu ServerView suite with iRMC S2 Advanced Pack

Mirrored data center

When it came to the renewal of the data center hardware by Bechtle, high availability played an important role for ARA Assistance. "With 24/7/365 availability we must guarantee the seamless operation of our competence center," Christian Jäger explains. "In our business we simply can't afford an IT failure." That is why the group opted for a mirrored data center at the Bad Windsheim headquarters that was planned and implemented by Bechtle. Thanks to virtualization and the enhanced performance of the new systems it was possible to reduce the formerly ten servers to three. Equipped with two Intel 6-Core CPUs with 2.66 GHz and 48 GB RAM each the three PRIMERGY RX300 servers constitute the basis for the VMware virtualization solution. Two servers stand in one data center and the third one in the other.

Central SAN storage systems

To ensure optimal data storage ARA Assistance operates one ETERNUS DX90 storage system per data center. The 80 employees who access the system generate a data volume of no less than 1 TB. "Data storage management has become a lot easier," says Christian Jäger. "Since all data is now located centrally on high-speed SAN storage systems by Fujitsu, I no longer have to worry about whether or not the data was complete during the backup process – and whether or not its recovery would be possible, should the necessity arise." The backup process runs automatically over the ETERNUS LT20 tape library solution that is connected to the SAN storage systems.

Enormous consolidation effects

The previously ten servers hosted both data and applications for the entire group. One of the reasons why it was possible to reduce them to only three servers is that it is no longer necessary to physically separate different company networks. "We have jointly virtualized the two networks for ARA GmbH and for the ARCD and Auto&Reise GmbH," Christian Jäger explains. "The networks still have two different domains. With VMware vSphere we can ensure that both networks are

detached although they share one physical server. This enables us to achieve enormous consolidation effects."

Countable energy savings

After cutting down on the number of servers as a result of virtualization the probably fastest measurable impact is that the energy consumption is drastically lowered. "This fact can best be observed by looking at the UPS devices in our two data centers," says Christian Jäger. "The servers used to place heavy demands on the UPS devices, using up to two thirds of their power capacity. Now we're down to less than a third and have been able to reduce our energy consumption significantly. This year we expect our energy costs to drop by as much as 60 percent, not counting the savings on air conditioning costs we are able to achieve by cutting down on cooling capacities."

Virtualization for more than one good reason

Besides determining the energy savings, Christian Jäger has compared the maintenance and administration costs of the old and the new systems. "When we take a look at the running costs with the new virtualized hardware our savings amount to as much as 55 percent a year with all factors taken into account." These considerable savings are also attained because the group has been able to optimize its hardware utilization, Christian Jäger knows:

"The CPU and storage utilization rate of the old systems was between 5 and 15 percent; in other words, 85 to 95 percent of the resources went unused. With our new virtualized environment we are able to achieve utilization rates of 60 to 80 percent and have thus increased our effectiveness noticeably."

And the great leap forward in terms of availability is something worth looking at, too, the Head of IT is pleased to report: "In the event of a hardware failure it takes only a couple of seconds to shift individual virtual machines and boot them on another physical server."



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