Centris AG has been a successful player in the IT services sector for more than 60 years, and over the decades, has developed into a modern IT service partner. Swiss health and accident insurance firms rely on the core competence of Centris to provide support for the IT and business processes of customers. To consistently offer these services at the highest level, the infrastructure of the Centris data warehouse (DWH) needed to be brought up to date, and Hitachi Data Systems was the ideal partner for this project.

Performance alone was not the deciding factor. Hitachi also scored highly because its system was compatible with all versions of Oracle, a crucial factor for us.

Julian Portmann
Head of Software Development
Centris AG

Centris AG reduces run times for business processes and optimizes TCO with converged Hitachi solution

Centris AG operates the Swiss Health Platform (SHP), an integrated and open complete system that supports the key business processes of health and accident insurance firms. This platform means that company-wide business processes can be individually designed and optimized on an ongoing basis. The SHP, developed in close cooperation between Centris specialists and its customers’ own experts, is now established as standard software in the health and accident insurance market.

Centris checks the invoices of 3 million insured people from across Switzerland. Its customers include Allianz Suisse, Aquilana, Assura, Atupri, Concordia, Helsana, innova, Die Mobiliar, ÖKK, Solida, Supra, SWICA, the Sympany Group, and the Vaudoise Versicherungen Group. In 2012, the workforce of approximately 160 staff generated a turnover of 52 million Swiss francs.

On a technical level, the SHP is characterized by its service-oriented architecture (SOA). This architecture contains all of the necessary elements for high-availability, high-performance operation, as well as for support purposes. The modern and modular concept lowers transaction costs and allows expenditure for development, operation and maintenance to be sustainably reduced over the long term. This modern integrated architecture enables future off-the-shelf products to be used with existing applications, protecting investments for the future.

Benefits at a Glance

- A massive reduction in process run times.
- Consolidation of multiple data warehouse servers to 1 system.
- High customer satisfaction thanks to high-performance systems.

Centris AG

Industry
Services: IT

Solutions
Converged, Compute, Modular Storage

Hardware
Hitachi Unified Compute Platform for Oracle Database, consisting of: Hitachi Compute Blade (2), and Hitachi Unified Storage 150 with Hitachi Accelerated Flash
The Challenges

Data Volume Growth in the DWH

Centris DWH services enable customers to gather and analyze data independently, creating a sound basis for significant decisions. The services include the most important legal analyses, and these are updated on a regular basis. This level of flexibility has consequences, as Head of Software Development at Centris, Julian Portmann, can attest: “We see massive increases in the volumes of data. Data can increase by up to a factor of 30 over 3 to 5 years.”

With this in mind, the future development of the process run times had to be scrutinized, because these run times are crucial to the long-term success of the solution. Forecasts showed that the existing infrastructure would reach its run time limits by the end of 2015. In addition, customers were increasingly expressing a wish to be able to access the results earlier and gain more flexibility in their own processes.

Optimize Through New Hardware

A sustainable, future-oriented solution was required to tackle this challenge. The software had already been fully optimized. For example, only the updated or changed data was still being loaded rather than the entire data file. The conclusion quickly became clear: The only element that could still be optimized effectively was the hardware.

The existing conventional solution with dedicated database servers and a remote storage solution needed to be replaced, and a proof of concept (POC) phase was started. An open solution was imperative, because dependence on a proprietary solution would present too great a risk. Hitachi Data Systems and 2 competitors were invited to present their solutions.

Select the Best Solution Provider

In July 2012, the POC phase got under way. Portmann and Head of Centris IT Operations, Lukas Gerber, were responsible for the entire process. “First of all we had to formulate a performance specification that included the factors of data volume, throughput and time specifications. On this basis, the applicants were then able to configure their test systems,” says Portmann.

In turn, each of the applicants constructed their test system on site at Centris, to allow the Centris team to put them to the test. Each of the 3 candidates had at least 2 weeks to do so, with the result of the entire process due in mid-September, around 10 weeks after the POC start.

The Solution

Hitachi Unified Compute Platform for Oracle Database

Storage specialist Hitachi Data Systems emerged as the winner. What was the crucial factor behind the decision? “Performance alone was not the deciding factor,” recalls Portmann. “Hitachi also scored highly because its system was compatible with all versions of Oracle, a crucial factor for us.” In addition to this advantage, there was also the factor of the total cost of ownership (TCO), taking into account the system’s ability to cope with future challenges.
Innovation is the engine of change, and information is its fuel. Innovate intelligently to lead your market, grow your company, and change the world. Manage your information with Hitachi Data Systems.

Centris AG Innovates With Information

Centris provides IT and business processes support for Swiss health and accident insurance firms. Centris AG operates the Swiss Health Platform (SHP), an integrated and open system that supports the key business processes of health and accident insurance companies. This platform means that company-wide business processes can be individually designed and optimized on an ongoing basis. In addition to supporting the SHP, Hitachi Unified Compute Platform for Oracle Database supports the Centris data warehouse (DWH).

Centris DWH services enable customers to gather and analyze data independently, creating a sound basis for significant decisions.

Thanks to the new Hitachi technology, Centris customers are also able to act on and innovate with information much more quickly: Business processes that previously took a long time can now be carried out in a much shorter timeframe.

The first real test came in January 2013, when the first project customers were migrated to the new system. The existing DWH customers went live in the new system in April and May, and in June 2013, the project was completed successfully. The system has been extremely stable and reliable to date, as Julian Portmann affirms.

The Benefits

In addition to typical time pressures and the search for the optimal configuration, this project involved new technologies and integration into the existing Centris IT environment. However, these issues were dealt with successfully, and the consolidation of several DWH servers into just 1 system was completed without a hitch.

Since its commissioning, the new system has been running to the great satisfaction of all parties. In terms of the required performance and forecast accuracy, Hitachi has been able to fully meet expectations with this solution. Centris customers are now benefitting from an environment that uses the latest technology. “The hardware is the enabler of our business, so everything must work perfectly,” says Portmann.

The problems relating to process run times are now in the past. In general, business processes that previously took a long time can now be carried out in a much shorter timeframe. Today, the 150TB test system and the 100TB production system run in parallel. The Centris team particularly values the flexibility and scalability of the new solution.

Teamwork on New Tasks

The lifecycle of a DWH infrastructure is around 5 years, and Centris is keen to continue its successful partnership with Hitachi Data Systems. The partnership has been positive throughout, according to Patrick Progin, CEO of Centris AG, who adds: “The specialists at Hitachi Data Systems are very competent and are highly committed to their work. Future collaboration with Hitachi Data Systems is definitely on the horizon.”

Solution Implementation

In November, Hitachi Compute Blade server and Hitachi Unified Storage (HUS 150) were delivered to the headquarters of Centris in Solothurn. The integrated hardware solution for the Centris DWH was sized for the company, and the HAF storage in particular was tailored to existing needs. “We really appreciated Hitachi’s outstanding flexibility in individually adapting the solution,” says Portmann.

The teams worked hand-in-hand throughout the process. While the specialists from Hitachi Data Systems were primarily responsible for solution development and preconfiguration, the Centris experts got involved to set up the Oracle environment and carry out the performance optimizations. And the HDS team performed fine-tuning.

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