German Bank Ensures Data Security With Virtualization and Replication Solution From Hitachi Data Systems

Frankfurter Bankgesellschaft (Switzerland) Ltd. is the private banking and wealth management division of the Sparkassen financial group in Germany. The bank’s extensive knowledge and services platform is based on an IT system that includes 2 external data centers and meets all company needs. To ensure that IT operations are run to the highest degree of efficiency, flexibility and security, the bank chose to focus on virtualization. Hitachi Data Systems met this challenge with a solution based on Hitachi Virtual Storage Platform and Hitachi TrueCopy synchronous remote replication software.

About Frankfurter Bankgesellschaft
An innovative financial institution, Frankfurter Bankgesellschaft played a pioneering role for the entire banking industry. In November 2011, Frankfurter Bankgesellschaft’s care philosophy “In a more personal manner” was awarded 1st place by a well-known industry report in the most important “Consultations” segment. The bank’s investment strategy is transparent and focuses on the Swiss traditions of “stability” and “preserving wealth.”

Legacy Hitachi Modular Storage Answered Earlier Needs
At Frankfurter Bankgesellschaft, 10 IT staff members manage around 80 servers, and these servers are operated in an open environment. Approximately 250 clients work on this Microsoft® Windows®-based system.

Frankfurter Bankgesellschaft has been working in storage with Hitachi Data Systems for around 10 years. Until now, a legacy Hitachi modular storage system was used for each location. In 2002, the 1st storage platform, Hitachi Thunder 9200 (SCSII), was put into operation. Not long afterwards, just a year later, in fact, the range of platforms was expanded with Hitachi Thunder 9585V.

We know that we are in very good hands at Hitachi Data Systems. The high level of competence, combined with wide-ranging expertise — above and beyond the storage sector — offers us an all-round carefree package.

Zdravko Ruzicic
Head of Systems and Network Engineering
Frankfurter Bankgesellschaft

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INDUSTRY
Banking: Private

SOLUTIONS
Virtualization, Enterprise Platform, Business Continuity and Replication

HARDWARE
Hitachi Virtual Storage Platform, legacy Hitachi modular storage

SOFTWARE
Hitachi TrueCopy synchronous remote replication software
According to the Head of Systems and Network Engineering at Frankfurter Bankgesellschaft, Zdravko Ruzicic, cooperation with Hitachi Data Systems has proved to be successful: “What we really value is the fact that HDS is conservative in an extremely positive way. Since it also develops its own hardware, much higher levels of performance and security can be obtained.” Both these qualities are essential for banks.

New Requirements: Continuity, High Availability, Synchronous Mirroring

At the end of 2010, when the Thunder 9585V system reached the end of its lifecycle after 7 years, the decision was made to switch to the Avaloq banking platform. Avaloq presents the storage system with new challenges, as it requires a higher level of performance.

The criteria for the new system were determined in the subsequent evaluation phase. Continuity and high availability were given priority. The synchronous mirroring of data between both locations via fiber-optic links was also required to ensure that disaster recovery is possible.

It went without saying that the performance requirements of Avaloq had to be met in their entirety. The systems of various manufacturers were checked, but technically speaking, Hitachi Virtual Storage Platform (VSP) was thought to be the best system from the outset. According to Ruzicic, previous Hitachi systems had been very successful. “For 7 years, the system ran very smoothly and without failures. We never experienced any loss of data,” he explains. These criteria are vital in the highly sensitive financial sphere. In addition, Hitachi Data Systems offered the best price-performance ratio compared to other suppliers.

In the end, however, same-day processing was key to the decision-making process as it ensures that the business can continue to run in any situation. This feature is subject to auditor inspection.

Hitachi Supports Ambitious Virtualization Goals

All these requirements were met in every regard. However, Frankfurter Bankgesellschaft set its sights on another ambitious goal: to be the 1st bank in Switzerland to virtualize Avaloq. This decision meant that the greatest challenge facing the project would be the performance optimization of the virtualization platform. Both storage specialists and clients embraced this challenge.

“We did and still do have great faith in Hitachi Data Systems,” says Ruzicic. “We have ‘our’ service technician, so to speak, who knows us and our solution down to the last detail.” This mission statement has proved to be successful at Hitachi, where more than 50% of its employees in Switzerland work in the services sector.

Smooth Implementation and Data Migration With Virtual Storage Platform

Implementation of the new systems also went smoothly. A Virtual Storage Platform replaced each of the Thunder 9585V storage systems. This decision meant that the bank had the most up-to-date high-end storage platform available on the market at the time. The system’s sustainability or “investment protection” was a huge consideration.

IT staff used TrueCopy software to synchronously mirror the data between the 2 locations. The predominantly virtualized data was subsequently migrated directly to the new storage system. HDS was responsible for the complete integration and migration.
of all physical data. In collaboration with the specialists at Hitachi, the bank carried out the migration of virtual data and migration from McData to Brocade on the new SAN infrastructure. There were no interruptions or problems of any kind throughout the migration process. Over the entire 3-month conversion phase, the VSP microcode upgrades were carried out in succession without any disturbances, as usual.

A Positive Conclusion: Storage Investment Is Protected

In addition to the technical requirements during the conversion and migration phase that were met successfully, the new storage system also offers end users other benefits on a day-to-day basis. “For us, it is important that daily tasks can be completed intuitively. Hitachi offers the best conditions for easing daily tasks with the graphic interface.” Hitachi Data Systems even takes into account investment protection, a crucial factor for every company.

Service and maintenance can be predicted to a large extent with all its systems. “As you would expect, this allows us to budget in detail for these often precarious items,” explains Ruzicic.

Hitachi Data Systems (Switzerland) holds the sales record in all of its markets across the globe with VSP. On the one hand, the success of VSP is thanks to the technical maturity of the product. However, in a market like Switzerland, with such a strong focus on quality, this technical maturity is only part of its success. The HDS storage specialists, therefore, place the greatest value on providing direct support to their clients, even in the midrange sector. This approach is valued highly at Frankfurter Bankgesellschaft, too.

Shared Visions

With its forward-looking orientation, Frankfurter Bankgesellschaft took up an innovative pioneering role for the entire banking industry. However, further development of the system is a mammoth task. Alongside the successful virtualization of Avaloq, the virtualization of all clients must now be addressed. The objective is to finalize this virtualization by the end of 2012.

Frankfurter Bankgesellschaft is also continuing to focus on its collaboration with Hitachi Data Systems: “We know that we are in very good hands at Hitachi Data Systems. The high level of competence, combined with wide-ranging expertise — above and beyond the storage sector — offers us an all-round carefree package.”