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INDUSTRY
Retail/Wholesale: Electrical Wholesaler

SOLUTION
Modular Platform, Business Continuity and Replication, File and Content

Hardware — Hitachi Adaptable Modular Storage 2500 (2), Hitachi Content Platform 300

Software — Hitachi TrueCopy® synchronous remote replication, Hitachi Replication Manager
Hitachi Storage Technology Supports Innovative Order Processing and Delivery for Electrical Wholesaler Otto Fischer AG

Founded in 1899, independent electrical wholesaler Otto Fischer AG employs about 280 people at its headquarters in Zurich. The family-run business delivers from its vast stock of about 260,000 products to electrical engineering companies across Switzerland every day. The company’s steady development and ambition to provide fast, accurate product order and delivery required a dynamic, scalable and dependable storage platform. Hitachi Data Systems delivered the business continuity and replication solution Otto Fischer AG needed, based on Hitachi Adaptable Modular Storage and Hitachi file and content and replication technologies.

About Otto Fischer AG

The customer base of Otto Fischer AG includes around 10,000 electricians throughout Switzerland. Most of these organizations are small or medium enterprises (SMEs). Around 60,000 orders are processed each month, and there are 3200 customer contacts on average, every day.

To be able to handle these quantities reliably, the goods management and order system must be efficient. All orders that are placed before 6 p.m. are shipped by 7 a.m. the next day. If the customer places an order before 10.30 a.m. and is based in the metropolitan area of Zurich, it may even be shipped on the same day. This speedy delivery is thanks to a complex system, used for orders and goods management as well as communication channels between customer, supplier and wholesaler. The system was the result of several years of development, and based on great ambition and expertise.

Early Collaboration for Innovative E-Commerce Solution

Tradition and innovation can go hand in hand, and Otto Fischer AG has proven this in an impressive manner. As early as its 100-year anniversary in 1999, the company took a completely new approach to sales with the introduction of an innovative e-commerce solution. This project also signaled the beginning of the successful collaboration with Hitachi Data Systems, which was initially put in place in 1998. “We recognized early on that a central system to cover our data storage requirements would be the ideal solution,” explains Head of IT at Otto Fischer AG, Max Bürgi. When searching for a suitable partner to implement an efficient storage system, the company came across Hitachi Data Systems. “It was not only the hardware available, but also the extensive expertise of our points of contact that impressed us at the time.” Otto Fischer AG finally chose the Hitachi Freedom 7700E. Its initial 146GB disk capacity now seems almost anachronistic, since it is comparable to amounts of data that can be carried about on a USB stick nowadays. At the time, however, that was a remarkable storage capacity.

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The First Real Mobile Online Shop

Nevertheless, time does not stand still and neither does data growth. After a few years, during which capacity continued to increase, the system was due to be replaced. In 2005, the paperless flow of goods was introduced. The entire process, from goods receipt to delivery with the customer, was processed electronically. For a company that champions an efficient approach to energy and resources, this aspect was important.

In 2006, Otto Fischer AG finally became the trailblazer of an entire industry when it launched the 1st real mobile online shop with mobile.ofag.ch. In this process, Hitachi Data Systems proved itself to be a dependable partner once again. “This simply corresponds to our mission statement, since partnership has always been extremely important to us,” explains Bürgi. The storage system at Otto Fischer AG was brought up to date with a Hitachi Thunder 9500™ V Series system, to fully meet the requirements of customer-oriented innovations.

New Age of Apps Requires Data Redundancy

Otto Fischer AG has therefore managed to evolve from a small, family-run business into a modern wholesaler. And even the most recent technological developments have already been used to benefit the customers, as well as the employees. The company recognized the potential of application (app) technology for business processing early on and focused on developing the corresponding tools. In 2010, it launched OF-Mobile, the iPhone app for electricians. This app can be used to place an order with Otto Fischer directly while still at the construction site. The supplier, in turn, gains valuable time, which helps in meeting its impressive service promises and customers’ corresponding expectations of quick delivery times.

Even before this point there was the analysis and evaluation stage to determine which system could turn these ambitious plans into a reality. The existing system had already reached capacity limits, according to Bürgi. “We would have had to make a significant expansion here. So we turned our thoughts to preparing for the future.” The main issue was data redundancy, as a 2nd server location had also been established. Once again, Hitachi Data Systems was included in the discussion. The storage specialist had known the wholesaler and its needs for many years now; there was, therefore, already mutual trust between them.

Smooth Implementation Ensures Security, Scalability and Flexibility

Together, Otto Fischer and HDS set to work on a future-oriented solution. Hitachi Adaptable Modular Storage 2500 with a 13TB capacity was installed in each of the 2 server locations. Mirroring was carried out using proven Hitachi TrueCopy® synchronous remote replication software, while Hitachi Replication Manager software was used for data management and configuration. “With Hitachi Data Systems, it was not only the hardware available that impressed us, but also the fact that we had extremely competent points of contact,” says Max Bürgi.

Another open issue, which still had to be resolved, was the secure storage of all electronic documents; the solution to this problem was the CORSA archiving system from BCT Deutschland GmbH. Otto Fischer AG decided to purchase Hitachi Content Platform (HCP) 300 with 4 servers and 6 x 250GB disk capacity for each. The addition of RAID-5 and SoftWORM, a functionality in CORSA means that each object can be saved (related to software) and can’t be changed, which fulfills data security and legal requirements. The results of the upgrade have been received positively in all respects, not least because of the smooth implementation process. The benefits of the new solution include:

- High data security thanks to separate and mirrored systems.
- Fast availability of storage space for new servers or in the case of expansion of the existing system.
- Flexibility and scalability thanks to centrally managed storage media.
- Extremely high performance in the area of enterprise resource planning (ERP), and the associated database.

Distributed Object Store Archives and Protects

“Otto Fischer leverages HCP as a distributed object store for archiving purposes and to store documents, such as vendor and customer invoices and other accounting documents that we are legally required to archive and protect from manipulation and data loss,” explains Bürgi. “In the future, we plan to use HCP to manage many additional documents, including digitized contracts, customer and supplier documents, planning and project records.
and emails. We greatly value the high performance, stability and scalability of HCP, and the trust we have in Hitachi as a reliable and long-standing partner. The outstanding service delivered by the HDS team we work with is very important for us,” he adds.

Next Steps: Document Digitalization and Email Archiving

Otto Fischer AG clearly recognized the signs of the times and reacted quickly to them. The latest technologies are in use to ensure that the company can meet customers’ ever-increasing demands, while continuing to retain its excellent market position. Over the years, Hitachi Data Systems has proven to be a reliable partner for Otto Fischer AG.

Bürgi is well aware that a storage system is a dynamic rather than a static structure. One project is but a springboard to the next, so there are already plans to strengthen the infrastructure further.

“We are constantly carrying out analyses and evaluations in the specialist departments so that we are in a position to react flexibly to all requirements,” he explains. Next, the company will address document digitalization and email archiving, since Hitachi Content Platform also offers all the functionalities required in relation to security and investment protection.