To stay competitive and continue to expand the business, SPAR Austria Group is focused on addressing future big data challenges now. The retail sector is facing rapidly increasing volumes of data and the simultaneous need to perform real-time analytics for business intelligence purposes. SPAR relies on Hitachi Unified Compute Platform (UCP) for the SAP HANA Platform to guarantee that vast quantities of in-memory data will remain nimble, secure and manageable over the long term, to support innovation and expansion.

The face of retail is changing right along with the transformations happening in commercial industries around the globe. From how business transactions are processed to what companies do with the data, the necessity is highly nimble IT architecture. IT must support faster 24/7 operations, big data analytics and business intelligence.

SPAR Austria Group is now poised to embrace these endeavors and to innovate well into its future. With a state-of-the-art enterprise-level converged IT solution from Hitachi Data Systems, the international retail chain is making huge strides in converting transactional data into meaningful information. Gaining business insights leads the company toward faster, better decision-making and forecasting.

SPAR, a 100% privately owned company, is one of Austria’s most modern and most innovative trading companies. The group’s core business in Austria and abroad (Northern Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Croatia) is the food retail business. With its subsidiary Hervis, SPAR has been successful in the sports retail business for 40 years. The SPAR Austria Group also includes SES Spar European Shopping Centers. At SPAR, people matter: the customers and the 77,000 employees. In 2013, the SPAR Austria Group (including Hervis and SES) achieved a turnover amounting to 12.94 billion euros in Austria and abroad. The food retail business in Austria contributed 5.8 billion euros. According to Nielsen, SPAR holds a market share of 30.1% in Austria.
The Challenge: Support Exponential Growth and Business Intelligence

On a daily basis, SPAR Austria Group deals with continually growing volumes of unstructured data. Because the data is highly business-relevant, managing the growth is a top priority for SPAR’s IT group. Presently, SPAR relies on SAP Business Warehouse (BW) infrastructure to perform data warehousing and business intelligence tasks, support development technologies, and integrate with all external data sources. SAP BW provides very sophisticated functionality that includes data extraction, mining, analyses, reporting, distribution and user access via an enterprise portal, Web applications and mobile devices.

SPAR uses other large applications, including SAP Customer Relationship Management (CRM). While exceptional at supplying so many business-critical factors essential to conducting business at SPAR, the SAP environments are rapidly increasing in size and becoming overly complex to manage.

Large quantities of SPAR data must always be available by users to effectively conduct global operations and maintain business advantage. Being able to respond quickly to market changes, inquiries and inventory demands is vital for shorter time to market and product rollouts: Business can literally depend on it. For these reasons, SPAR wanted to find a superior IT architecture to support future changes, rapid deployments and efficient data growth. Requirements included optimum scalability, simplicity and speed across SAP and other enterprise environments at SPAR.

“We wanted to secure a successful future for the company to grow in whatever ways and areas are important. IT infrastructure must be able to support these prospects with flexible, performance-driven, and resilient platform. Initially, we were not sure there was anything out there capable of meeting our demands,” says Andreas Kranabitl, managing director for SPAR’s information and communication services (ICS).

The Solution
Partnering Intelligence

To help SPAR mine for potential solutions to its data management goals, Kranabitl reached out to trusted vendors, including long-time partner Imtech ICT. Having worked as one of SPAR’s partners for many years, the Imtech team has extensive knowledge of the challenges facing the retailer. SPAR needed a solution that would be simple to implement and maintain, and that also had a short lead time.

As one of Austria’s premier IT providers, Imtech ICT helps its customers develop the right solutions and effect logistics for smooth transitions. After evaluating the unique issues, requirements and goals at SPAR, the Imtech team recommended a tailored converged solution based on Hitachi Unified Compute Platform for the SAP HANA Platform.

“SPAR had a complex and high-cost infrastructure stemming from support issues and multiple suppliers. By working together with Hitachi Data Systems and deploying its unique converged solution, we were able to create a pioneering IT environment that will meet the demands of SPAR’s commercial enterprise,” explains Andreas Weigl, Imtech’s key account manager for SPAR.

The strategic partnership between Hitachi Data Systems and Imtech will provide SPAR lasting benefits from the best blend of support, technology and knowledge for its enterprise SAP landscape. “What Hitachi brought to the table was quality and expertise. Hitachi did an excellent job of pinpointing the problems we face and putting together a professional and compact package supported by a great customer service team,” adds Kranabitl.

Converged Solution

The Hitachi Unified Compute Platform solution family comprises enterprise-class converged technologies for the highest levels of efficiency, agility and resilience, which are intended to expedite greater business value. Hitachi combines compute, storage, software management and networking in fully integrated packages. Hitachi UCP provides solutions for all workloads, and catapults efficiencies and rapid deployment without technology compromises automated provisioning of new SAP environments for swift deployment rather than the labor-intensive processes of traditional solutions.

Hitachi UCP for SAP HANA is specifically designed to ensure real-time analytics and real-time application deployments, and is built on the SAP HANA database. Available for scale-out and scale-up architectures, and delivered as an appliance or a service via the cloud, UCP for SAP HANA is ideally suited to manage mission-critical environments within a single enclosure. Hitachi scale-out architecture means that SAP HANA can run continuously in business-critical environments.

The SPAR installation of UCP for SAP HANA includes 2 Hitachi Virtual Storage Platforms, 2 Hitachi Compute Blade Servers (CB 2000), Hitachi Unified Storage and Hitachi NAS Platform (HNAS), with a total of 150TB usable storage. This UCP for SAP HANA installation accommodates 2 SAP HANA platforms housing 77TB each and 3 SAP HANA platforms, each with 256GB and a VMware cluster. Cutting-edge Hitachi blade server technologies work in concert with Hitachi enterprise storage to deliver highest availability and seamless data operations. As part of the overall architecture, HNAS promotes consolidated, high-performance common backup solution without disrupting services. Ideally suited to support the new generation of SAP in-memory computing, UCP for SAP HANA provides SPAR with faster access than ever before to analytical results and the latest business figures.

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The SPAR BW platforms were migrated to UCP for SAP HANA. Additional SPAR systems and SAP environments, such as the CRM and finance, controller and human resources are planning to follow. The aim is to complete the migration of all SPAR applications to SAP HANA by 2016.

“We wanted to certify that all operational and business data can be instantly accessible, so our users can readily access information and facilitate prompt response to changes in market conditions. We believe UCP for SAP HANA is a rapid, reliable and easily scalable solution, which will be able to consistently handle our dynamic workloads, no matter what,” says Kranabitl.

The Benefits

Added Value Through In-Memory Technology

UCP for SAP HANA accesses all current information from virtually any data source in the IT environment for immediate analysis and trend identification. Innovative Hitachi in-memory technology keeps the database in large-capacity memory and speeds up transaction processing, such as cash flows and account activity. SAP HANA platform transforms business decision-making with real-time analytics, which leverage in-memory data for actionable and predictive insights. SPAR is able to avoid any previous bandwidth restrictions on exchanges between analytical systems.

On a day-to-day operational basis, this allows real-time responses to changes in turnover and market conditions. By transmitting and immediately analyzing receipt data, the system can tell employees which products are selling slowly so that they can respond to this information in real time: For example, they can stock shelves more efficiently or optimize product placement.

Productivity and Return on Investment (ROI)

Productivity gains across SPAR Austria Group are being realized in the form of significantly accelerated business processes. Users are experiencing superior response performance during search queries, which helps to reduce the time needed to process transactions or forecast inventory. This UCP for SAP HANA solution goes beyond high-performance requirements imposed by SAP HANA, to guarantee ROI in less than 18 months.

SPAR anticipates being able to create new business models and better identify disruptive market patterns, as well. Having a nimble IT infrastructure allows SPAR to recognize and respond to anomalies as they emerge, thereby turning the “enabled enterprise” into a reality.

Competitive Advantage for the Future

The SPAR Austria Group has developed from a commercial business operation solely within Austria into a prosperous European enterprise. With international trade and the acquisition of new markets, customers and sales channels, SPAR also has new IT challenges. Moving to an enterprise converged infrastructure has helped to ensure the company’s competitive livelihood.

“IT is becoming an increasingly significant strategic factor in business success. HDS and Imtech have helped us to scale and accelerate our SAP HANA landscape appropriately using UCP for SAP HANA, a system that can handle the high-performance demands we need to fulfill our future corporate vision,” Kranabitl mentions.

With UCP for SAP HANA securely in play across SPAR Austria Group’s environment, the retail giant is primed for innovative initiatives, such as predictive analytics tailored for retail. Predictive analytics pinpoint trends and nuances in business markets. For retail, the value is being able to better forecast to avoid unnecessary markdowns, overstock or out-of-stock, and to optimize pricing, purchasing and promotions.

“The Hitachi UCP technologies will help us stay ahead in the markets, fine tune what we need to supply to best meet customer needs, and support a most efficient business model. We at SPAR are now wisely prepared to meet and proactively address any changes and growth,” Kranabitl concludes.