“System administrators now have access to an extensive range of tools that allow them to monitor and adjust everything at a detailed level. The result is a fully redundant and controllable storage environment, which reduces our operational costs.”

Jerry Sordam
Project Manager
WML

WML – Waterleiding Maatschappij Limburg

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SUCCESS STORY

WML Increases Data Center Stability and Scalability with Hitachi Storage

Until recently, WML only had 1 computer center, which constantly fell short of the requirements the organization set for reliability, stability and scalability. The producer of drinking water from Limburg in the Netherlands therefore opted for an external data center with a very high level of availability. They would use their in-house computer center as a backup location in the event of major incidents. After a painstaking selection process, WML chose a storage management solution based on Hitachi technology.

Beckers explains. “Of course, a partner can play a useful role during implementation, but we felt they are more likely to muddy the waters at the selection stage.”

Ultimately, the decision was based on 4 criteria. In addition to total cost of ownership (TCO), these were compatibility, functionality, and management and support. WML entered into a final discussion phase with the 2 suppliers that came out on top. This phase included a reference visit to a customer.

“With HDS, we visited Waterschap Aa en Maas, the water board for the Aa and Meuse rivers,” says Sordam. “This [trip] was a useful reference visit, because you then hear the story from the customer’s side. The enthusiasm of Aa en Maas indicated that choosing Hitachi Data Systems would not mean choosing just good technology, but also a reliable partner.”

The experiences of Aa en Maas dovetailed with the impression that WML themselves had built up in the meantime. WML saw that Hitachi Data Systems is a “no nonsense” supplier that doesn’t try to make matters look better than they actually are. “They are honest and direct,” Sordam explains.

Flexible

WML opted for 2 Hitachi Adaptable Modular Storage 2300 systems with an additional Hitachi NAS Platform 3080, powered by BlueArc® for file sharing and server consolidation. Hitachi NAS Platform is predominantly used to transfer unstructured data.

Functional Design

The 1st step was to bring in an independent storage expert to create a functional design for the new environment. With this functional design clearly in mind, a delegation from WML visited the Storage Expo. The technical specialists evaluated the solutions the suppliers offered from a functional perspective, while Sordam and Beckers looked primarily at the reliability of the supplier. “We wanted to work with proven technology. We also think the human side is important; after all, you are entering into a long-term relationship with each other.”

The tender document that resulted from the functional design and the discussions with suppliers was sent to 6 suppliers. "We made a conscious decision to skip the partner channel; we wanted to do business with the manufacturer directly,”

WML saw that Hitachi Data Systems is a "no nonsense" supplier that doesn’t try to make matters look better than they actually are. "They are honest and direct."
The implementation went well. In spite of the detailed specifications, the team gained new insights approximately 3/4 of the way through the implementation, which led to a discovery that necessitated a small adjustment in the design. "At moments like that, you both have to be flexible," says Beckers. "We didn't want to pay too much for the additional work and Hitachi Data Systems wanted to charge an honest price for it. If you have a good relationship, handling this kind of discussion is relatively easy."

**Extensive Range of Tools**

WML has been working with the new storage solution for quite some time now, to their full satisfaction. The 2 permanent contacts at Hitachi Data Systems receive few queries from Maastricht.

"The system is future-proofed and well-structured, and it is also very clear that it is hugely beneficial for the system administrators. They now have access to an extensive range of tools that allow them to monitor, adjust and troubleshoot everything at a detailed level. This [access] reduces our operational costs," says Sordam.

"They were very eager to learn and have completed the training sessions enthusiastically," he continues. "This [training] means a huge step forwards for them in their everyday work. The ‘mindless’ monitoring work has been automated, so they can keep their hands free for improvements to our IT environment."

WML now houses its data in 2 locations, 1 being an exact copy of the other. Sordam hopes never to have to use the copy but, if that day does come, then the team is trained to go through a controlled failover properly. "WML tests the failover mechanism periodically, simply to be certain that the failover works and to ensure that the failover procedure remains clear in your mind. That way, if a failover actually occurs, you can deal with the stressful situation more or less on autopilot," says Sordam.

**Reliability**

Both men look back on the process with satisfaction. Sordam and Beckers have 2 pieces of advice for other organizations that want to renew their storage environment: "Make sure that your specifications are crystal clear, and do not simply go for the lowest price; look at the quality and reliability of a supplier as well. After all, you are entering into a long-term relationship with each other."