SUSE

iSphere Technologies

Industry and Location
MSP | South Africa

Product and Services
SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for
    SAP Applications
SUSE Linux Enterprise High
    Availability Extension
SUSE Manager

iSphere Technologies trusts SUSE's stable, secure and cost-effective platform to drive its multi-tenanted iHANA offering

Success Story

![SUSE logo]

At-a-Glance

To deliver maximum performance and reliability for its new SAP HANA as-a-service platform — named iHANA — iSphere Technologies selected Fujitsu Integrated System PRIMEFLEX for SAP HANA running SUSE® Linux Enterprise Server (SLES) for SAP Applications. By leveraging economies of scale, iSphere Technologies offers clients the benefits of a high-end in-memory architecture without the associated operational and capital costs — helping them run their businesses better and more economically.

Overview

Founded in 2012 and headquartered in Midrand Kyalami, South Africa, iSphere Technologies is a leading managed services provider. The company's comprehensive offering includes hosting for SAP business systems, as well as backup, data recovery and business continuity services. iSphere Technologies partners with global enterprise technology companies such as SAP, Fujitsu, Microsoft, Brocade, Netapp, VMware and veeam, and delivers carrier-grade hosting and aggregation services to clients across South Africa.

Challenge

Throughout South Africa, enterprises are looking for ways to harness their business data to drive smarter and faster decision-making, and to improve the speed and reliability of core operational systems. As the pressures of always-on business and the demand for analytics both increase, so too does the demand on the underlying IT infrastructure — and as a result, many businesses are looking to the cloud as a way to contain cost and complexity.

Hilgardt Cloete, CEO at iSphere Technologies, takes up the story: "The maturity of the managed services model makes it an increasingly attractive proposition for businesses. By eliminating the capital cost of procuring systems, storage and networking infrastructure — and the substantial operational cost of managing and maintaining the platforms — businesses can redirect the investment to focus on their core competencies.

"Many of our clients operate in competitive industries where tight control of processes and costs is vital to maintaining healthy profitability, and they rely on SAP business systems to manage their complex workflows from end to end.

iSphere Technologies trusts SUSE's stable, secure and cost-effective platform to drive its multi-tenanted iHANA offering SUSE.com

> "In our assessment, SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for SAP Applications is unbeatable for reliability and performance in a SAP HANA environment."

LUDI NEL
Technical Director
iSphere Technologies

"As long-term users of SAP, our clients have been quick to recognize the potential of SAP HANA to cut end-user appli-cation response times and deliver readily con-sumable business intelligence. While [SAP] HANA was initially launched as a way to accelerate reporting and analytics, we see that many businesses are choosing to move their entire SAP application land-scape to the SAP HANA platform.

"We saw a valuable opportunity to offer our clients the benefits of an enterprise-class SAP HANA environment, especially the ability to utilize the real-time SAP S/4HANA ERP suite to accelerate and enrich their strategic decision-making. We decided to create a cloud-based delivery model, enabling our SAP clients to consume SAP HANA as-a-service. And by leveraging economies of scale, we knew we could also reduce the barriers to entry for small and medium-sized companies — even those completely new to SAP solutions."

Solution

To deliver maximum performance and reliability for its new SAP HANA as-a-service platform — named iHANA — iSphere Tech-nologies selected Fujitsu Integrated System PRIMEFLEX for SAP HANA environments powered by the FlexFrame Orchestrator.

"We chose Fujitsu because they are the only vendor with built-in support for multi-tenanted, virtualized SAP environments," says Ludi Nel, technical director at iSphere Technologies. "Using Fujitsu FlexFrame Orchestrator software enables us to manage SAP applications, databases and the SAP HANA platform from a single pane of glass, which vastly reduces the time and number of staff we need to manage complex environments for our clients. With FlexFrame Orchestrator, we can also deploy SAP components dynamically across both our physical and virtualized resources, which gives us the flexibility to respond to client demand for new services quickly and efficiently.

"Better still, PRIMEFLEX for SAP Landscapes was designed in close collaboration with SAP, which gave us the confidence that the platform would be the optimal choice for our SAP HANA environment. In fact, all of the systems and software — including servers, storage and networking, as well as Fujitsu, NetApp and VMware software — are pre-integrated and pretested, ensur-ing rapid, secure and low-risk deployment of the infrastructure."

Cloete adds: "We have considerable experience with Fujitsu systems, and over the years we have cultivated a very strong local and international relationship with

SUSE

> "The partnership between SUSE and Fujitsu is very strategic, which means that the integration between all of the software components in our environment extends straight down through the stack."

HILGARDT CLOETE
CEO
iSphere Technologies

the organization. In our experience, Fujitsu support has always been excellent — anything that cannot be resolved locally is quickly escalated to the appropriate department globally. Our positive work with Fujitsu over the years — combined with their market-leading position in the SAP infrastructure space — made them the clear choice for our new iHANA offering."

To deliver the targeted performance and stability for its SAP HANA as-a-service environment, iSphere Technologies chose SLES for SAP Applications. Specifically tuned for SAP software, the SUSE operating system's dedicated update channel means that all packages are pretested for performance, security and stability issues with SAP software. Any that fall short of the expected standards are fixed and rigorously retested before they are pushed into the update channel for the main branch of the distribution.

"SLES for SAP Applications presented a number of advantages over Red Hat Enterprise Linux," says Nel. "In our assessment, SLES for SAP Applications is unbeatable for reliability and performance in a SAP HANA environment. And because the SAP-specific SUSE solution is fully integrated with SUSE Linux Enterprise High Availability Extension, we knew that we

could obtain 99.999% availability for our clients' mission-critical data far more simply and cost-effectively than with Red Hat Enterprise Linux."

Because SLES for SAP Applications is the development platform of choice for SAP, iSphere Technologies had confidence that its deployment would be fast and straightforward.

"The strength of SUSE and SAP's strategic partnership is clear in the tight integration between the two vendors' software," says Cloete. "Similarly, the partnership between SUSE and Fujitsu is very strategic, which means that the integration between all of the software components in our environment extends straight down through the stack.

"For example, our FlexFrame orchestrator is directly connected to SUSE Manager, which enables us to provision and de-ploy SAP application images and manage the underlying operating system without switching between multiple systems. From a management efficiency perspective, we see that the combination of SUSE and SAP software with Fujitsu systems is the recipe for success."

After an in-depth, two-year planning and research process, iSphere Technologies

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PIETER SMIT
IT support specialist
iSphere Technologies

had selected all of the solutions that would support its new iHANA offering. In June 2015, the company made the decision to move forward with the deployment of the platform. At the end of February 2016, the company's new iHANA offering went live.

"Thanks to the time we invested in the planning and blueprinting phase of the project, our deployment ran very smoothly," says Cloete. "From end to end, deploying Fujitsu Integrated System PRIMEFLEX for SAP HANA with SLES for SAP Applications took just two and a half months, of which the implementation of the physical systems took just two weeks."

Currently, all of iSphere Technologies' clients are running SLES for SAP Applications 11 SP4, and as of August 2016, the company will also support SLES for SAP Applications 12.

Pieter Smit, IT support specialist at iSphere Technologies, comments: "Throughout the deployment process, we worked closely with a team of SUSE experts who flew over from Germany to provide guidance and assistance. As our previous in-house experience was centered around Microsoft products, we knew that there would be a

steep learning curve as we moved forward with our enterprise Linux deployment — but with the SUSE team's support we got up to speed very quickly.

"Today, we feel very comfortable using Linux. Once it's up and running, it's exceptionally stable, and there is little that we need to do to manage and maintain it. Compared with our experience of other operating systems, we've found that the stability of SLES for SAP Applications means it fades into the background — helping us focus on value-added service development."

iSphere Technologies offers two distinct SAP HANA solutions under the iHANA brand. The first is a managed services solution that includes the operating system, databases and networking components required for clients to complete their own SAP HANA installation, and the second offering delivers SAP HANA as a ready-to-run service. The company has two routes to market, offering the solution directly to clients as well as via business partners as a white-labelled service.

"Depending on our clients' specific business requirements, we offer both platform-as-a-service and software-

as-a-service options for SAP HANA," says Cloete. "The software-as-a-service option dramatically simplifies the deployment of SAP HANA, bringing it within the financial reach of small- and medium-sized enterprises that would previously not have been able to take advantage of this in-memory platform."

Nel adds: "All of our iHANA solutions come with high availability as standard, as well as cold disaster recovery capabilities for all production systems. Using Fujitsu FlexFrame Orchestrator, we enable our clients to take snapshots of their SAP HANA environments, which is extremely useful for routine tasks such as patching. Clients can apply patches to the snapshot, test it and apply the patched image to their entire environment when they are ready. As a result, the turnaround time for maintenance is far lower than with other services."

Results

With Fujitsu and SUSE solutions at the heart of its new SAP HANA platform, iSphere Technologies is achieving its goal of delivering in-memory ERP and analytics as a managed service.

"The cost difference between running a dedicated on-premises environment for SAP HANA and obtaining the solution as a service is extremely significant, and our iHANA proposition is already having a disruptive influence in the South Africa market," says Cloete.

"We had 12 SAP HANA customers up and running on the new platform from the first day of the iHANA launch. Despite the fact that the platform is less than four months

old, we are expecting to double the number of clients on the platform within another four months and quadruple it in just nine months. Of our current client base, around 40% migrated from on-premises environments, 20% were hosted with another provider and the remaining 40% are completely new SAP deployments.

"By leveraging our economies of scale, we can help our clients achieve all the benefits of a high-end architecture without the operational and capital costs that would normally come along with it. Across the board, our clients can execute core processes and run their reports orders of magnitude faster than before — helping them work more effectively and make better-informed decisions more quickly."

As demand for its iHANA solutions grows, iSphere Technologies is ready to scale out its platform to serve clients from across South Africa.

"We have a number of clients who are already committed to moving to the iHANA platform in the months ahead, and we expect many more in the future as confidence in the platform grows," says Nel.

"Because we utilize a fully virtualized infrastructure that is pre-configured for the requirements of SAP HANA environments, we can scale very quickly without the need to swap out hardware — which will be a crucial advantage as our business growth takes off. We are in close contact with Fujitsu for capacity planning, which helps us to rapidly integrate additional SAP HANA nodes to meet evolving requirements."

iSphere Technologies now offers clients and prospects a cost-effective route to SAP HANA in the cloud — even if they are

not immediately ready to make the transition.

"What makes the iHANA offering unique is our ability to migrate clients from SAP R/3 to our managed services platform, and at a later date convert the environment to the SAP HANA platform over a Gigabit Ethernet connection — a fast, risk-free process," says Nel.

SLES for SAP Applications offers iSphere Technologies the stable, secure and cost-effective platform it needs to drive its multi-tenanted iHANA offering.

Cloete concludes: "We are now bringing SAP HANA to businesses for which an enterprise-class in-memory solution would previously have been out of reach — enabling them to harness their business data to achieve smarter, faster decision-making and faster, more efficient operations. We're already seeing massive demand for our iHANA solution, and by continuing our close collaboration with Fujitsu, SAP and SUSE, we are in a strong position to continue to grow our business."

Benefits

- Offers rapid, cost-effective scalability as the business grows
- Delivers built-in high-availability features to protect mission-critical client data
- Enables straightforward management of virtual and physical resources via a single pane of glass

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