AutoData Norge AS

AutoData Norge AS runs SUSE® Linux Enterprise Server for System z alongside z/VSE on an IBM zEnterprise z114 mainframe. The SUSE operating system provides a lower-cost and more flexible platform for creating new web-based applications, helping AutoData to expand its offerings in an efficient manner.

Overview

AutoData Norge AS provides hosted and managed IT solutions to importers, wholesalers and retailers of automotive spare parts and supplies throughout Norway. It offers a full package of functionality across sales, inventory management, procurement, billing, accounts receivable and payroll, and has around 700 customers of all sizes.

Challenge

Margins are tight in the automotive spare parts and supplies industry, and businesses are keen to run as lean as possible. For small and mid-sized companies, the cost of setting up and maintaining a full in-house IT department is likely to be prohibitive. Even for larger companies, ensuring adequate service levels and keeping up with business demands for new functionality may be difficult if they have a national network of outlets.

By providing secure shared services running on an ultra-reliable IBM mainframe, AutoData aims to fill this gap, allowing its customers to benefit from enterprise-class

IT systems without the cost of a large internal IT department.

Historically, AutoData had run all its systems on the IBM z/VSE operating system, and was very satisfied with the reliability and performance. However, it wanted a more flexible and less costly platform on which to develop new applications and customer environments.

Solution

Rather than build a new set of services on a distributed server landscape—which would add significant cost and complexity—AutoData followed IBM's recommendation to add a new partition for Linux on its existing mainframe. On the strength of outstanding long-term cooperation between IBM and SUSE, IBM also recommended the SUSE Linux Enterprise distribution above other supported distributions, and AutoData validated this option by visiting several reference sites in Sweden.

"We determined that SUSE Linux Enterprise would be the best distribution for us on the mainframe," said Roger Evans, programmer analyst at AutoData Norge AS. "I had personal experience of using it on other platforms, and I particularly liked the YaST® configuration tool."

AutoData has been running SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for System z for approximately five years now. The company recently upgraded to the latest IBM zEnterprise technology, deploying a z114 server with 247 MIPS of performance to

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STEIN SANDVOLD
Chief Operating Officer
AutoData Norge AS

AutoData at a glance:
Specialist provider of IT services to automotive supply chains in Norway

■ **Industry and Location**
  High Tech, Norway

■ **Products and Services**
  SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for System z

■ **Results**
+ *Reduced software maintenance costs by running new mainframe workloads on Linux*
+ *Enabled faster and less costly response to customer demands for new functionality*
+ *Created a stable, flexible environment for serving multiple customers securely*

run both z/VSE (natively) and SUSE Linux Enterprise Server (virtualized on IBM z/VM). For data storage, the company is currently migrating from its existing IBM solution to a new IBM DS8800 array that offers three times the performance.

"We use an Integrated Facility for Linux—a dedicated 'specialty' processor for Linux on the mainframe that allows us to run Linux applications without incurring any additional MIPS-based IBM software charges," said Stein Sandvold, chief operating officer, AutoData Norge AS. "This keeps all of our licensed MIPS available for the z/VSE workload, so that we maximize the price-performance of the server. Adding a Linux partition to our System z9 mainframe allowed us to add new workload without using additional MIPS. We did not need to upgrade our z9 server until the launch of the latest z114—so we were able to skip the investment in the intervening z10 technology"

AutoData is currently running 20 virtual servers on the Integrated Facility for Linux specialty engine—these host web-based applications developed in-house—and can create new ones within a matter of minutes. "If we want to set up a new customer environment, we simply fire up a new virtual server using YaST, as there's practically no system overhead," said Evans. "The z/VM paging system works well, with very little latency. In our opinion, running Linux on z/VM on the mainframe is a much more efficient virtualization environment than VMware on distributed servers. It also reduces the number of physical platforms we need to monitor and manage."

Results

Running SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for System z on the IBM mainframe gives AutoData a flexible, easy-to-manage and highly cost-effective platform for new services. It also enables new web-based applications to be launched more rapidly.

"Everything we do is driven by our customers, and SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for System z allows us to be much more responsive to their needs," said Sandvold. "For example, we recently launched a 'tire hotel' service that has created a whole new revenue stream for many of our customers."

Using Linux also gives AutoData access to a wider pool of skilled technicians and support resources than are available for z/VSE. "The key values of Linux for us are simplicity, support and agility," said Evans. "We value the professional support from SUSE, and we play an active part in the broader user community, which is often our first port of call for information."

AutoData is using the mainframe to introduce cloud offerings, the first of which is platform as a service (PaaS). The company now provides prebuilt software stacks to selected clients, created as virtual Linux servers on the z114—for example, LAMP environments ready to run web services, and dedicated data warehouse solutions tailored to a customer's reporting requirements.

"The mainframe has relatively high acquisition costs," said Sandvold. "However, thanks in part to SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for System z, it is highly cost-effective in terms of the long-term TCO. This is not only because of the software license and subscription savings with Linux on the IFL, but also because the IBM mainframe enables us to serve a large and varied customer base with just a small internal team. Here in Norway, salaries are a significant part of our cost base; the mainframe helps us to run lean, so that we can offer excellent value for money to our customers."

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