



Success Story

Server

Business Connexion

Business Connexion deployed SUSE® Linux Enterprise Server for System z to run a new monitoring solution for clients. The ability to run multiple virtual servers side-by-side on a single mainframe processor ensures low software costs for the solution, enabling Business Connexion to offer a powerful solution at a highly competitive price.



Business Connexion

Business Connexion at a glance:

Headquartered in South Africa, and with offices throughout Africa and in UK, the company has a 32-year history in the provisioning of ICT services to the financial sector, government, the petrochemical industry, the automotive industry and more.

■ Industry and Location

IT services, South Africa

■ Products and Services

SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for System z

■ Results

- + Created a flexible environment for hosted services
- + Delivered high performance for Oracle databases
- + Enabled competitive pricing for client services

Overview

Business Connexion (Pty) Ltd. is a leading, black empowered Information and Communication Technology (ICT) company committed to adding real value to its clients. Headquartered in South Africa, and with offices throughout Africa and in the United Kingdom, the company employs 6,635 people.

Challenge

Aiming to extend its internal helpdesk management solution and make it available as a hosted service to clients, Business Connexion determined that the existing platform was not a viable long-term option. The company was running BMC Remedy IT Service Management Suite on Solaris, and determined that the cost of licensing the underlying Oracle database across numerous processors would make it difficult to offer solutions to clients at a competitive price.

"We had a general requirement for a new, highly flexible yet low-cost platform for

hosting virtual client environments," said Frans Labuschagne, Senior Manager for Open Systems Support Services at Business Connexion. "The first such environment was to be the new release of Remedy ITSM, and we determined that we would need very high availability and database performance. Equally, we needed a solution that would be stable and easy to manage, so that we could keep our internal costs low."

Solution

Business Connexion has a long history with the IBM mainframe—for more than 15 years it has hosted mainframes on behalf of clients. Today, the hosting part of the business has two IBM System z10 Enterprise Class servers in separate Tier-4-certified data centers (denoting the highest recognized level of robustness and service availability), each with one Integrated Facility for Linux (IFL) engine.

The Oracle database component of the BMC Remedy solution is licensed on a per-processor basis. Realizing that the advanced z/VM virtualization on System z would enable a large number of virtual client environments to run on a single mainframe processor (the IFL), Business Connexion determined that this would be the best platform for the new Remedy implementation—not least because the company already had the IFLs and could avoid making any additional capital investment.

"At that time, we had some Red Hat Enterprise Linux environments running on the IFL," said Sybrand Lintvelt, Senior Systems

"With SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for System z, we get excellent performance and bullet-proof reliability—plus it's easy and cost-effective to manage."

FRANS LABUSCHAGNE

Senior Manager for Open Systems Support Services
Business Connexion

“Looking at where SUSE is heading in terms of its product set and the alliances it’s creating, I think not being on the SUSE track is detrimental to any IT business at the moment!”

FRANS LABUSCHAGNE

Senior Manager for Open Systems Support Services
Business Connexion

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Engineer—Open Systems at Business Connexion. “However, in terms of both availability and database performance, SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for System z was clearly the better option in terms of an end-to-end solution.”

Business Connexion deployed Remedy ITSM on virtual machines running SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for System z on both IFLs. The company used the SUSE Linux Enterprise High Availability Extension included in the standard subscription to create a full geographic cluster between the two data centers. The solution is an active-active cluster, so users are load-balanced between the two sites in normal operation, and automatically moved to the remaining node in the event of a failure at one site. Business Connexion currently has approximately 50 virtual machines across the two mainframes—a mixture of database servers, application servers and proxy servers for several different hosted clients.

The solution makes it fast and easy for Business Connexion to set up new hosted environments—both for the Remedy solution and for other software in the future. Using z/VM with SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for System z, the company can quickly clone a new instance from an existing template, customize it, and release it to the client.

Results

From the Business Connexion point of view, the key benefit of using SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for System z is the cost advantage it offers.

“Based on the utilization of database servers on the mainframe, we calculated that the production environment equates to about 36 Intel-based servers,” said Labuschagne. “Running in a distributed landscape would have pushed the Oracle

licensing costs way beyond the point where we could offer a competitively priced solution to our clients. SUSE Linux Enterprise Server on the mainframe is a real strategic enabler for this whole service offering.”

Further clear advantages of using Linux virtual servers on the mainframe are the flexibility and speed of expanding the environment. It is far quicker, easier and less costly to fire up a new virtual server than to size, procure and implement a new physical server. There are also no potential problems with hardware compatibility, and essentially no impact on space and power in the data center.

“Particularly from a software cost perspective, IFL running SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for System z is very attractive,” said Labuschagne. “The more Intel CPUs you add, the higher the cost for licensing products such as Oracle. With the IFL, Oracle is priced as running on one CPU, and you can run as many virtual machines as you want with that one subscription. That means the cost is a very manageable component as we grow. For a hosting and IT services company, that’s a very important benefit.”

Business Connexion also values the openness of SUSE Linux Enterprise Server, and the ready availability of technical support.

“From the technical perspective, the availability and supportability of any product are crucial factors,” said Labuschagne. “We got an immediate response from the local SUSE team when we started looking into the solution, and the relationship has gone from strength to strength since then. The SUSE community is very open, and you get a real sense of people working together to open up the capabilities of the platform.”



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