Ecogas

Fueling rapid growth and building game changing analytics with SAP, IBM POWER and SUSE. As business expands rapidly, the transaction volume threatens to overload Ecogas’ existing IT systems. They needed a more robust platform to tackle business growth and add new analytics to their SAP solution. After evaluating many different solutions, the winning combination was IBM Power Systems and SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for SAP Application.

Overview
Ecogas specializes in distributing natural gas to households and businesses across six provinces in Argentina. A regulated monopoly, the company serves 1,251,281 customers via a distribution network spanning almost 30,000 km.

Challenge
Change is afoot in Argentina’s energy industry. To make the country more energy self-sufficient, to help its domestic economy thrive and to reduce dependence on imports, the government is creating market conditions that encourage energy providers to boost their production of natural gas and other fuels.

Any increases in production will require companies downstream, such as those that transport natural gas from drilling rigs to regional hubs, and the distribution companies such as Ecogas that transfer the fuel to households and businesses, to manage larger business volumes.

“Working closely with IBM and SAP, we are confident that we will keep on discovering new ways to boost efficiency, save money and provide better customer service”

OSCAR SOBRERO
Head of IT
Ecogas

Now, Ecogas is preparing to cope with that growth. Oscar Sobrero, Head of IT at Ecogas, takes up the story: “It’s an exciting time for Ecogas. We already serve nearly 1.3 million households and businesses, and our business is set to expand even further.

“However, this growth also presents a problem. Our commercial systems, which we use for processes such as managing customer payments, were running almost at full capacity. The expected growth threatened to overload us, slowing response times and impacting the quality of service that our end-customers receive.

“We set out to find a solution that could better support our growing business.”

Solution
Ecogas wanted a new solution that could integrate seamlessly with its existing suite of SAP ERP applications, which includes modules for finance and controlling, materials management, human resources management and plant maintenance, as well as SAP Portal.

Previously, the company had been running two different commercial systems—one to support its Distribuidora de Gas del Centro S.A. business, which serves the provinces of Cordoba, Catamarca and La Rioja, and another for its Distribuidora de Gas Cuyana S.A. division, which operates in Mendoza, San Luis and San Juan.
Ecogas decided to replace both systems with a single instance of SAP for the Centro subsidiary’s commercial system as well as backup instances of the SAP ERP environment and a backup instance of Cuyana division’s commercial system as backup instances of the SAP ERP environment. Ecogas chose to deploy the latest IBM Power Systems™ servers to run SAP for Utilities and SAP HANA, THE COMPUTER, an IBM Business Partner, provided expert assistance throughout the implementation.

“With the proposals from the other vendors we looked at, we would have needed multiple physical servers to obtain the same capacity, taking up space and increasing maintenance, power and cooling costs.”

Oscar Sobrero continues: “Senior managers require us to keep mission-critical systems like our SAP ERP environment up-and-running at all times—even when there are spikes in transaction volumes. We rely on IBM Power Systems, because the servers offer spectacular performance and round-the-clock reliability for our SAP environment. We first started using Power in 1998, and we’ve been running our SAP ERP applications on it since 2001, and we’re extremely happy with the platform.

**Overview**

Once the SAP HANA implementation is complete, Ecogas plans to take advantage of the platform to analyze more business data than ever before, revealing actionable insights.

“Our business generates enormous quantities of data—such as detailed figures on energy consumption and payments,” explains Oscar Sobrero. “Traditionally, it has been difficult for us to analyze such large volumes of data to obtain insights to support decision-making. With SAP HANA, all that will change.”
“We plan to use the SAP HANA platform to perform in-depth analysis of energy consumption, predicting how much natural gas customers are likely to use at any given time, and examining how weather affects energy consumption. With these insights, we’ll be able to better prepare for peaks in demand and reduce the risk of supply shortages, providing stellar customer service.”

In addition, Ecogas plans to work out the best ways to contact different customer segments concerning late payments. For example, by finding out which customers are more likely to respond by email, texts, phone calls or letters, Ecogas can use the most effective channel to encourage to make payments earlier, boosting cash flow.

Further down the line, Ecogas plans to extend the SAP HANA solution with SAP for Mobile.

“We employ hundreds of people to visit customer houses to take meter readings, which are used to generate monthly bills,” comments Oscar Sobrero. “The meter readings are currently recorded using mobile devices, and at the end of each day employees travel to one of our offices to transfer the data across. By switching to SAP for Mobile and integrating the solution with SAP for Utilities, we can enable automatic data transfer from any location—saving our employees unnecessary trips.

“What’s more, the same teams also respond to customers who smell gas leaks, and to cut off customers who don’t pay. They currently record the work undertaken on paper for subsequent entry into the system. By leveraging SAP for Mobile, we’ll be able to eliminate the need for manual data transfer, boosting employee productivity.”

The SAP HANA solution provides a sturdy platform to support rapid future growth. To further sharpen its analytical capabilities, Ecogas plans to deploy SAP BusinessObjects in the future.

Oscar Sobrero concludes: “Deploying SAP for Utilities is just the start of our journey to become a smarter, more agile business. Working closely with IBM and SAP, we are confident that keep on discovering new ways to boost efficiency, save money and provide better customer service.”

**SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for SAP Applications**

Facing a surge in customer count and fully taxed IT infrastructure, Ecogas wanted performance gains. SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for SAP Applications, optimized for SAP HANA performance and with built-in high availability clustering fit the bill perfectly. Working with the local solution provider and IBM, with 24x7 priority support directly from IBM, Ecogas had great success in their SAP implementation and is now able to provide blazing fast analytics to help anticipate customer needs and provide better integrated service.
Contact your local SUSE Solutions Provider, or call SUSE at:

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