

Softsource gain edge through HP Converged Infrastructure and 3PAR storage technology

"We wanted to tap into the world-class infrastructure that HP could provide. From a server, storage and networking point of view, it made commercial sense to provide everything with the interoperability connectivity afforded by HP's different product sets." Pablo Garcia-Curtis, general manager, Softsource



Objective

Create a leading-edge data centre employing green technologies to offer clients new levels of customisation and efficiency

Approach

Conversations with 3PAR at early planning stage; formal contact with HP, following its acquisition of 3PAR, once plans were confirmed

IT improvements

- Ensures technologies work in harmony, without conflict, using HP Industry Standard Servers
- Delivers a multi-tiered, multi-tenant storage platform
- Provides a secure, scalable and customer-partitioned network layer, capable of incorporating high-touch embedded services
- Improved Power Usage Effectiveness through low power draw equipment and sophisticated rack cooling systems to circulate water
- Able to remotely specify their hardware requirements and access to their custom-designed solution within 30 minutes

Business benefits

- Able to offer customers increased flexibility with low entry-level costs, coupled with the ability to scale up rapidly as needed
- Reduced operational costs through lower power consumption and simplified systems structure
- Reduced complexity due to a single source for all hardware

HP customer case study:
Softsource builds leading-edge data centre to provide world class services

Industry:
IT solutions



Softsource is an IT solutions integrator, formed in Auckland in 2004. Its goals are to provide business customers with the highest quality solutions for their IT infrastructure and hosted services needs, and to lead the market in adopting the most appropriate new technologies.

Softsource employs 42 staff plus contractors and partners around New Zealand. Its clients include banks, publishers, breweries, transport companies and local government, among others. Softsource has earned a reputation for both the breadth of its technology portfolio and staff expertise.

Until recently the company operated as a best-of-breed systems integrator, with technology often installed on customers' premises. However, the sliding cost of communications and evolution of technologies have reached a point where access to world-class enterprise arrays is no longer reserved for those companies able to purchase their own



hardware and house it on-site. Centralising technology in a data centre allows Softsource to provide clients of all sizes with the best possible equipment and solutions available, employing multi-tenanted systems to increase utilisation and reduce costs to customers.

From day one, the intention has been to build the country's most state-of-the-art data centre. This would deliver Softsource three clear benefits: bring leading-edge solutions to the New Zealand market, open up services to new market sectors, and, in light of growing environmental concerns, adopt world-class green credentials.

Plans were drawn up to start work on a new facility in Auckland.

Building the vision

This was no vanity project; there was clear business demand for such a resource.

"Certainly, the growth of cloud computing has given us the ability to bring world-class infrastructure to a variety of New Zealand businesses at a very low entry level cost. We saw an opportunity to realise the potential of cloud technology for their business and to use our expertise to help them enjoy these benefits," says Softsource general manager, Pablo Garcia-Curtis.

Assessing the build requirements for this Tier Three facility would be critical. Softsource had already investigated how 3PAR's storage solutions could be integrated prior to HP's acquisition of 3PAR. With the technology already proven at an international level, and with HP and Softsource working together since 2004, a decision was made to build New Zealand's first HP Converged Infrastructure data centre.

Garcia-Curtis says Softsource wanted to tap into the world-class infrastructure that HP could provide. "From a server, storage and networking point of view it made commercial sense to provide everything with the interoperability afforded by HP's different product sets."

The inclusion of HP 3PAR storage elements, designed to deliver a multi-tiered, multi-tenant storage platform, proved a huge differentiator for the data centre. 3PAR technology provided the agility Softsource needed to align application requirements with data Quality of Service levels precisely and on demand.

The data centre architecture was built on the HP Networking E5412 fabrics, providing the necessary flexibility, with 10Gbps connectivity and a dual IPV4/6 base operating system. The build itself was completed very quickly as there were few compatibility issues due to the use of industry-standard hardware. Construction of the building began in September 2010 and staff shifted to the premises by mid-January. Work then began on the data centre which was officially launched in June.

The data centre has been set up as essentially a plug-and-play system where the floor capacity for equipment, power and cooling has already been built in to allow expansion through new racks and systems which can be easily added to those already in place.

The ability to add capacity not only benefits Softsource's clients, but also allows the company to work on expanding its own operations. There was an increase in staff numbers to coincide with the data centre launch. The company has no intention of resting on its laurels.

"We aim to continue leading New Zealand in cloud technology and that is an area we will continue to invest and develop to ensure the technology gets better and cheaper," Garcia-Curtis says.

Timely solutions

The New Zealand economy is not immune to global economic pressures. Growth has slowed, and though there are signs of recovery, business confidence is fragile. Organisations have struggled to justify large-scale capital expenditure, particularly on IT projects.

"Budgets are tight and we're finding customers have fewer people and less money to spend, but still need to achieve more," Garcia-Curtis says.

"Part of the service we're putting together - is the ability for people to expand their business without having a huge capital outlay.

"We're finding a lot of customers are holding on to all types of technology and not replacing it as quickly as they used to. There is huge benefit in giving customers the ability to grow with technology, without being stuck with one system for a four or five year period then having to make a massive leap to the next level. Our infrastructure allows businesses to grow with us, removing those headaches."



Empowering solutions

The use of flexible systems and HP Converged Infrastructure allows Softsource to empower its customers, giving them control over their own hardware. A portal allows customers to log on remotely, decide what hardware they need, and begin using immediately.

The application of this concept is a first for New Zealand, says HP Enterprise Storage, Servers and Networking country manager, Trevor Armstrong.

“Hosting’s been around before, but this has provided businesses with the ability to turn things on and off remotely, and configure to their specific needs. To design a server with ‘X’ amount of CPUs and have it ready in 30 minutes, rather than waiting two or three weeks for a factory to build it, ship it out to you, and then for it to be built and tested. This process happens instantaneously.”

The option to ramp up processing power is something Softsource expects to be utilised as part of an organisations’ usual activity, such as the end of a financial year where activity increases for a month or so. It is also geared to cope with the most challenging of circumstances.

The earthquake in Christchurch, which devastated much of the city’s Central Business District in February 2011, provided timely, if unfortunate, evidence of the benefits of remote hosting.

For businesses based in the CBD, the immediate aftermath meant loss of equipment and staff unable

to travel in to the office. With business owners unclear as to when insurance would pay out or how quickly the economy would recover, there was understandable caution about making long-term technology decisions. With Softsource’s new system, customers would be able to access infrastructure over the internet. They could log on and spec it up, CPUs, RAM, what sort of operating system, how many users, and within 30 minutes they would be up and running.

Freedom through the cloud

Thankfully, this situation is exceptional, but it is reflected in a broader business trend. Organisations are now looking to shift more of their everyday computing to specialised data centres, taking the pressure off their own infrastructure.

“Staff can be free to concentrate on what they are best at, while these everyday tasks can be put in the cloud and we look after that for them,” says Garcia-Curtis. “It is an enormous opportunity for New Zealand businesses to gain productivity.”

The cloud also opens up new overseas markets for Softsource, removing many of the old geographical barriers.

“We believe this is a global service. Because it’s cloud we can offer it anywhere, so it’s a model we want to replicate throughout the world,” says Garcia-Curtis.

Customer solution at a glance:

Primary hardware

- HP Industry Standard Servers
- HP Networking E5412 fabrics
- 3PAR F400 Storage System

Bright, green credentials

If Softsource is to open up new international markets, it knew it had to work to world-class credentials. Its environmental reputation would be a key component. Building a new centre from scratch allowed Softsource to create not just New Zealand's most energy efficient facility, but, potentially, a totally self-sustained environment.

The state-of-the-art hot aisle containment cooling system maximises the cooling effectiveness over and above the traditional data centre cooling technologies. Heat sensors provide maps of which areas require more or less cooling, allowing tailored solutions and preventing excessive use of cooling systems.

"We have a three-step approach," Garcia-Curtis says. "We use the latest technology from HP to reduce power consumption up-front, then we're getting smart on how we cool that environment – using heat exchangers and water cooling. Down the track, the next step will be to add solar arrays and wind turbines to give us power generation capability."

Softsource has set a goal for the data centre to achieve a Power Usage Effectiveness rating of 1.2, matching the performance of the world's leading organisations such as Google and Yahoo, and significantly below the New Zealand average rating of 1.6 – 1.9.

Initial power saving estimates put power usage up to 30 per cent lower than rival facilities, with savings expected to increase this number to 40 per cent in the future.

In addition to reducing the organisation's carbon footprint, this also provides significant costs savings for Softsource, which can be passed on to customers.

Building green also helps to future proof the data centre as both businesses and governments increase focus on emissions. By staying ahead of the curve, Softsource ensures any future emissions or power consumption requirements are met, avoiding further expense or disruption of services.

"We believe that long term there will be benefits to having a green vision, and addressing this concern today serves as another differentiator, showing Softsource is addressing all aspects of our customers' business," Garcia-Curtis says.

A secured future

While the specs are impressive, Garcia-Curtis points out that the data centre remains, fundamentally, a tool. Businesses will be drawn solely to the results it achieves.

He says the centre provides an enormous opportunity for New Zealand businesses to take advantage of a world-class resource which allows them to increase productivity and concentrate their focus on core business functions.

"Others will watch the success of this closely and will look to replicate it. But at this stage we've got a first-mover advantage. We've got a window of opportunity that I'm confident we will maximise."

With a successful build in place and a strong partnership with HP, Softsource is now looking toward similar builds overseas.

The integrated nature of a Converged Infrastructure model means additional data centres will not only offer localised services to new markets, but will also increase the capacity and level of redundancy across all data centres, ensuring the maximum value and performance are derived for both Softsource and the company's customers.

The company's focus on innovation has resulted in a model which it can take anywhere in the world, providing customers with the best possible range of technology and services.

Share with colleagues



Get connected

www.hp.com/go/getconnected

Get the insider view on tech trends, alerts, and HP solutions for better business outcomes

