Leading Slovenian Insurer Credits End-to-End Virtualization

SID-First Credit Insurance Company Inc. Ljubljana builds new systems on complementary Cisco architectures for continued rapid growth in competitive market

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: SID-First Credit Insurance Company Inc., Ljubljana

Industry: Insurance

Location: Ljubljana

Number of Employees: 71

Challenge

· Build end-to-end IT environment in greenfield site to support rapid expansion without need for significant in-house resources

Solution

· Complementary Cisco Unified Computing Architecture and Cisco Borderless Network Architecture for completely virtualized network and data center systems

Results

· Greater server performance and IT productivity
· Single administrator and better use of resources
· 30 percent energy saving from powering down VDI clients overnight

Challenge

SID-First Credit Insurance Company Inc., Ljubljana has established itself as the leading specialist credit insurance provider in Slovenia. Founded in 2005, it covers the risk of non-payment through a comprehensive range of insurance services to private companies trading abroad and at home. By the end of 2012, the company will employ 71 people at its head office in the Slovenian capital, Ljubljana.

Following a period of rapid expansion, the business relocated from its parent company's office to a separate site and seized the opportunity to build an entirely new data network, paving the way for a fully virtualized IT environment.

"Our main challenge was to create a totally new data center," says Simon Kaučič, IT manager at SID-First Credit Insurance Company Inc., Ljubljana. "All the predictions were for continued business growth as the demand for credit insurance rises in Slovenia, and we needed an infrastructure that would support us in fulfilling the needs of our market."

In its new home, the company also wanted to build a consolidated and easy-to-manage infrastructure with more efficient power consumption and virtualized desktops. In addition, it wanted systems that would grow with the business and take advantage of emerging technologies.

Solution

Looking at a totally greenfield site, and with a small IT department of just seven people, SID-First Credit Insurance Company Inc., Ljubljana wanted to choose a proven solution from a trusted company. "The price performance ratio of Cisco UCS servers could not be matched by competitors," says Kaučič. "We found the combination of attractive numbers, excellent support, and pre-integrated products very compelling."

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IT Manager
SID-First Credit Insurance Company
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By investing in Cisco® Unified Computing Architecture and Cisco Borderless Network Architecture, the company aimed to reap the benefits of an end-to-end solution. Consolidating its new data center onto rack-mounted Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS®) C-Series 2010 servers, the company has realized the key benefit of the Cisco Unified Computing Architecture, which is to bring servers and storage together into a single management domain on a secure and reliable network fabric. It works with EMC Symmetrix VMAX 40K storage arrays and VMware vSphere Hypervisor virtualization software to manage the creation and movement of virtual machines and the interfaces with which they communicate.

All traffic travels via Cisco Catalyst 3750 Series Switches running at 10Gbps, and the servers are configured into virtualized resource pools that adapt to match workload requirements. On these virtual machines, applications can be moved between servers to balance workloads or prepare for scheduled downtime, all under the control of Cisco UCS Manager. With the virtualized infrastructure in place, any future server and network configuration changes are performed by the same management system, removing the need for re-cabling, the installation of multiple redundant adapters in each server, and separate switches for each network medium. These data center efficiency gains have helped boost productivity.

Other benefits include service profiles and template tools, which enable the business to create new servers or reconfigure existing servers in a fraction of the time that it would take in a traditional data center. The service profile contains all the specifications and settings that define the server, while the template allows the definition of service profile policies, putting the system administrator in complete control of data center resources.

The Cisco Borderless Network Architecture is also built on Cisco Catalyst® 3750 Series Switches in the core and Catalyst 2960 Series Switches providing LAN connectivity. In the network, too, the business has deployed a virtualized model. This arrangement segments the network into a series of virtual LANs, helping enable streamlined access to a range of Linux and Lotus Domino business-critical insurance applications, all hosted in the UCS data center. Links to virtual machines can be managed and shifted by UCS Manager, simplifying system administration and reducing the amount of time spent by the IT team on infrastructure management.

The company is also deploying a virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI), using Citrix XenServer, to give users thin-client access to private cloud-based applications, including standard Microsoft Office applications, also hosted on the UCS servers.

"The support from Cisco, particularly in designing the network and the IT infrastructure, has been an important factor in the success of the project," says Aleš Žerjav, head of the IT department at SID-First Credit Insurance Company Inc., Ljubljana. The system was designed, configured, and implemented in just three months, a vital requirement for the company, which needed to move into its new premises as soon as possible.

Results

SID-First Credit Insurance Company Inc., Ljubljana is a great example of a pioneering young enterprise embracing the combined potential of a unified network and virtualized data center to deliver vital business and cost benefits. The choice of the Cisco UCS platform with its smart, intuitive GUI, has streamlined system management for the seven-strong IT team. This streamlining liberates the team to focus on productivity and strategic deployment rather than addressing day-to-day network management challenges.

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Aleš Žerjav
Head of IT Department
SID-First Credit Insurance Company
Inc., Ljubljana

"Interoperability between Cisco products is streets ahead of other vendor platforms," says Žerjav. "If we had chosen a mixture, it could have created technical issues that might have impacted our aim to rapidly build a scalable, centrally-managed infrastructure."

Cost saving benefits associated with UCS and the VDI deployment were realized from day one. The UCS C-Series servers feature an Intelligent Platform Management Interface, which manages server power states and monitors operational parameters, helping to ensure the most efficient energy consumption and helping to save on data center operational costs. At the front end, by powering down VDI clients overnight, the company will save as much as a third of its current costs simply by reducing energy consumption.

Although most of the company's employees are office-based, around 10 percent work remotely and access the system over a secure Internet-based VPN. For those mobile workers, migration to VDI is expected to be completed soon and user satisfaction, already high among the early adopters, is expected to be replicated right across the enterprise.

"The implementation and expansion of the system have both been easy," says Žerjav. "When I think what we have achieved and the time we have done it in, I could not be more pleased. System performance has increased. We can do everything from our own office. The data center requires just one administrator, who manages it and provides all the resources the company requires. There is so much less need for detailed system management than before." Instead these data center resources can be re-assigned to IT projects of a more transformational and value-creating nature.

Next steps
The new infrastructure is just the start of an exciting journey for the business. With the data center solution optimized, plans to extend VDI across the whole organization are well advanced. The company will soon be upgrading the network to include wireless connectivity, while the integration of IP telephony and videoconferencing is also likely to feature in future plans. "With Cisco UCS providing such a solid foundation for our IT strategy," Kaučič says, "the way ahead is full of possibilities for expansion, particularly as wireless connectivity is brought in."
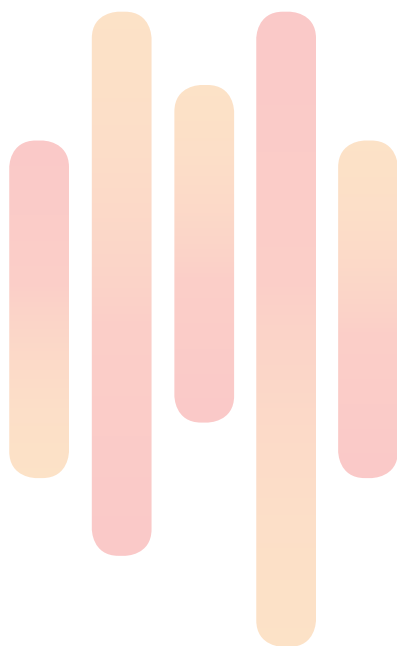
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www.cisco.com/go/datacenter
www.cisco.com/go/borderlessnetworks
www.cisco.com/go/ucs

Product List

Data Center Solutions
· Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS)
· Cisco UCS C210 Rack-Mount Servers
· Cisco UCS Manager

Routing and Switching
· Cisco Catalyst 3750 Series Switches
· Cisco Catalyst 2960 Series Switches

Applications
· Microsoft Office
· Linux custom insurance applications
· Lotus Domino custom insurance applications
· Citrix XenServer
· VMware vSphere Hypervisor™ virtualization software

Storage
· EMC Symmetrix VMAX 40K storage arrays

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