ERCO

ERCO stabilises its SAP environment with Remote Infrastructure Management

Architectural lighting specialist relies on HPE Datacenter Care - Operational Support Services

Objective
More stable operation of aging IT infrastructure

Approach
Transfer operational tasks to a service provider, as they are not a strategic task for the IT department

IT Matters
- More stable IT operations than before
- Frees up the IT department's time for strategic tasks
- All processes are now standardised
- Good documentation ensures that processes are more transparent
- Good collaboration with HPE experts through ITIL process orientation

Business Matters
- The IT department is available as a business consultant for the digital transformation process
- Fewer disruptions and system failures than in the past due to more stable IT operations
- Cost benefits, as HPE maximises the available resources

At ERCO, the IT department is regarded as a business consultant. That's why running the IT infrastructure does not rank among strategic tasks. Therefore, ERCO has outsourced its business-critical server, storage and backup infrastructure operational tasks within the SAP environment to HPE. Since doing so, operations have been running with greater stability.

Challenge

High turnover of IT workers
As pioneers in the field of lighting technology, ERCO has delivered lighting solutions for architectural masterpieces, including the Berlin Reichstag, Milan cathedral, the Imperial Forums in Rome, the Louvre in Paris, the PRADA Foundation in Milan, the National Portrait Gallery in London, as well as for international fashion brand stores such as adidas, PUMA or Colette. Its lighting tools have been installed in Sydney, Malaga, Dubai, Montevideo and London Stansted airports, as well as in universities, churches, hotels, exhibition stands, shop windows, administrative buildings, parks and private residences across the world. The product range has been fully based on LED technology since 2015.

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– Oliver Heid, Head of IT, ERCO

The family business, which was founded in 1934, operates in nearly 40 countries with over 60 subsidiaries, branches and agencies worldwide. IT services for all of the sites are delivered from two data centres in Lüdenscheid.

"Because digital transformation is being rolled out across the entire business, from products to manufacturing, we increasingly have a balancing act in the IT department, with stable IT operations on the one hand and speed and innovation on the other," explains Oliver Heid, Head of IT for ERCO GmbH. "We see ourselves increasingly as consultants and service providers to the business for anything IT-related - with the aim of making ERCO into the world's leading digital lighting manufacturer. In this context, our IT systems operation is not a way of differentiating ourselves and is therefore no longer a key competency. The IT department focuses much more on its know-how in IT matters, business processes and methodological expertise in the provision of consultancy to the business divisions."

For this reason, ERCO separated systems operation from project management some time ago.

The IT service operation division, which ensures the smooth operation of systems, follows the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL), which is the de facto standard for IT service management. It monitors the systems proactively, provides first and second level support and ensures that system configurations and processes continually improve. "In view of the ever-increasing complexity and importance of IT systems for our business, the only way to achieve systems stability is by 'industrialising' our IT operation," Heid explains.

The IT service operation division's priority is running the SAP environment, which comprises six productive systems supporting the company's core business processes at ERCO.

This HP-UX environment has become outdated and will be replaced in the medium-term, as ERCO is preparing to switch from the SAP Business Suite to SAP HANA - and this new SAP environment requires different operating systems. In this respect, the existing IT infrastructure is becoming obsolete for ERCO. Nevertheless, Heid was faced with a challenge when IT staff, who knew the environment like the back of their hand, left the company.

"It was clear at that time that we would need to use the old HP-UX environment for around another two years. It was out of the question to take on new workers for an environment that we strategically no longer wished to develop. Therefore, we needed an external partner to bridge the gap," says Heid, when thinking back to the situation at the time.

Solution

HPE Datacenter Care - Operational Support Services

It came down to a final choice between two companies and ERCO chose HPE Datacenter Care - Operational Support Services (DC-OSS). "With Hewlett Packard Enterprise, the whole package was right. In particular, the more professional structures and service delivery, which is closely aligned to ITIL, were decisive for us," says Heid. "In addition, services are delivered by a team rather than by individual, specially appointed people, which is the case with other service providers. Our fear with that was if those people were absent due to illness or left the company, then we would be facing the same challenges as we were before. That risk was too great for us. With HPE, we have a partner with adequate replacement staff for such an occurrence - which means that we can be sure that our IT infrastructure will run smoothly and that we in the IT department won't have to take care of organisational issues."

HPE delivers services to ERCO from its IT Operations Centre. "The HPE experts with whom we work all speak German. That is very nice for us, although English-speaking workers would have also been fine," stresses Heid.

There were three stages in the transfer of operations from ERCO to HPE which took place over a period of just under two months. In the first phase, a technical consultant from HPE was onsite in Lüdenscheid to find out about the environment from the outgoing ERCO IT staff. Documenting and preparing for the transition also occurred during this time.

In the second phase, HPE took over incident management, basic monitoring and daily system checks from ERCO. A technical consultant, who coordinated the processes with the lighting manufacturer, was also onsite during this time. At the same time, standard operating structures were installed which now incorporate the complete HPE operational support system, comprising remote monitoring, incident and problem management, change management and service request management. In principle, all services are provided from the HPE IT Operations Centre. However, a technical consultant can also be onsite as required. With basic monitoring, HPE now monitors all of ERCO's systems daily – this includes servers, SAN/storage, backup environment and operating system. The results are collated into reports using a traffic light system. The company's IT department is informed if preset threshold values are exceeded. Either ERCO or HPE subsequently implement countermeasures.

Customer at a glance

Application
SAP Business Suite

Hardware
- HPE StorageWorks Enterprise Virtual Array (EVA)
- HPE StoreEver MSL Tape Libraries

Software
- HPE Data Protector

HPE services
- HPE Datacenter Care - Operational Support Services

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Benefit

Greater stability in IT operations

Once a month, the two companies exchange information about service requests for forthcoming projects. For instance, if new infrastructure is needed, new servers are connected or the storage area is extended. "It is sometimes enough to make new capacity available by reconfiguring existing systems which are no longer required. In this respect, the HPE experts always have good ideas which help us to keep costs low for the IT environment which has come to the end of its life," says Heid.

"Our collaboration with Hewlett Packard Enterprise is very successful. Our IT operations are now more stable, and as a result we have a higher level of quality than before, because together with HPE we have been able to scrutinise the structures that have developed organically over the decades. As a consequence, many processes are now perfectly organised. In addition, regular monitoring from HPE helps to maintain stability."

Due to better basic stability, it is now also possible for ERCO to make slight adjustments to the IT infrastructure - such as allocating scarce capacity to the correct systems.

"In the past, we avoided doing that at all costs - keeping to the adage 'never change a running system'. Changes are no problem now, as we have a stable system environment and good documentation," says Heid. One change is in backup creation: In the past, several tools for different systems were used, but today HPE carries out all backups using HPE Data Protector software. This is for both the SAP and non-SAP environments. "Backup consolidation means that our security procedures now take very little time. This does not impinge on the work of the business."

Because of the good experiences ERCO has had with HPE Operational Support Services, Heid is clear that ERCO also wants to outsource hardware and operating system level operations to a service provider in the future – once the switch to SAP HANA has been made. This is so that the IT department can concentrate on strategic tasks relating to digital transformation – "and that may well be HPE again."

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