H.Essers maintains control over all strategic processes

Software platform available everywhere via centrally managed HP Thin Clients

Industry
Transport and logistics

Objective
H.Essers aims to guarantee streamlined processes. Automation and standardisation play an important role, in the same way as the internally developed software platforms. The rapid growth of the company requires a flexible and reliable ICT infrastructure

Approach
From an IT point of view, the whole organisation is controlled from a central data centre at its headquarters in Genk, using Citrix virtualisation software. The choice, in both the office and the warehouse environments, is to work almost exclusively with thin clients, which can easily be managed remotely

IT matters
• IT systems always up-to-date

• Scalable IT solutions

• Flexible implementation

Business matters
• Rapid business growth

• International expansion

• Streamlined processes

"HP Thin Clients provided by our supplier, LNS, are not only offered at the right price:quality ratio, but also have the necessary flexibility and the required software manageability."

– Ivar Indekeu, IT infrastructure manager, H.Essers

Growth in transport and logistics sector requires scalable ICT infrastructure

H.Essers has become a leading player in Europe in the field of transport and logistics with 41 locations spread over 12 countries. The ICT infrastructure of its own software platforms is centrally managed from its headquarters in Genk. The rapid expansion of the business requires scalable solutions. Flexible partners, reliable equipment and software along with prompt services are essential.

Challenge

Logistics and transports

With almost one million square metres of storage space and 41 locations spread over 12 countries, H.Essers has grown to become a leading player in Europe in the field of transport and logistics for sectors such as chemistry, pharmaceuticals/healthcare and high-quality products. More than 4,630 employees achieved a turnover of €484 million in 2015. The company not only owns the warehouses and the fleet of 1,360 trucks with 2,900 trailers, but also the IT systems, explains Ivar Indekeu, IT infrastructure manager, H.Essers: "This makes it possible to maintain optimal control over all strategic processes."

Own software platform

H.Essers is especially known for its two main activities: transport and logistics. Transport conveys goods from A to B, while logistics provides temporary storage of these goods - also called warehousing. In addition to the transport and warehouse activities, H.Essers is also active in forwarding (air and sea freight) and customs and provides value-added services such as uni-dosing of medicines, repackaging, relabelling, etc. Companies wishing to outsource their inventory management also use H.Essers.

Indekeu is in charge of the department responsible for the optimal functioning of H.Essers' ICT infrastructure. He explains: "Both the transport activities and the logistics services of H.Essers run entirely on software platforms programmed for its own needs. To ensure that the software is optimally maintained we employ 60 programmers, analysts and project managers who ensure that the software is updated every six weeks. We also have an infrastructure team of about 20 people."

Rapid growth

The rapid growth of the company places high demands on the ICT infrastructure. New warehouses, new clients and new markets ask for flexibility and scalability, but at the same time, reliability should always be guaranteed. "We therefore standardise and automate our processes as much as possible so that we can focus on the important things and can quickly adapt," says Indekeu. "Of course we hope that our suppliers go along with it. LNS is a good example of this: they collaborate with us and come up with solutions."

Solution

Centrally driven thin clients

H.Essers decided to set up a central data centre at its headquarters in Genk, Belgium, about fourteen years ago. The entire organisation's IT is managed from there, using Citrix virtualisation software. Indekeu says: "We chose to work almost exclusively with thin clients at the time, in both the office and the warehouse environments, because we could easily manage them remotely. At the start of that project we looked at various options and chose HP Thin Clients from our supplier, LNS. This not only gives us the correct price:quality ratio, but also the flexibility and the required software manageability."

The chosen IT strategy and the selection of HP Thin Clients have never been called into question, says Indekeu. He explains, "This conforms perfectly to our needs and requirements. We now work with a total of about 1,000 thin clients, in addition to another 300 laptops. There are virtually no desktop computers in our organisation. The thin clients are durable and they are basically only replaced if they are no longer compatible with a new version of the Citrix software. Last year that involved about 280 copies." The HP t620+ Thin Client is also used: "Fourteen years ago it was standard practice to work with one screen per thin client. However, in the past five or six years, a thin client with dual screens has become the norm and nowadays some workplaces even work with three or four screens per thin client."

The powerful video capabilities of the HP t620+ Thin Client are a great advantage in this regard, comments Indekeu: "It is important to us that we do not need separate thin clients in order to run two, three or four screens."

Indekeu also refers to the connectivity of the HP t620+ Thin Client as an important advantage: "We are currently rolling out a new WiFi network in our warehouses, so we no longer depend on a wired network in the workplace. We can place the HP t620+ Thin Client anywhere in our warehouses, even in places with no fixed network connection – we could even put them on the forklifts! These options give us the flexibility that we need."

Up to date – everywhere and always

The commissioning and maintenance of new or replacement thin clients are managed from the head office in Genk, says Indekeu. "LNS provides us with the new equipment and we make sure that they use HP Deployment Services in our network. We ship the default-configured thin clients to the destination and, thanks to HP Device Manager, we know where each device is located. This allows us to further configure them to suit the client, for example, when Russia needed a Cyrillic keyboard. With this remote installation we can ensure that the thin client is always up to date."

Customer solution at a glance

Hardware
• HP t620+ Thin Client

Software
• HP Deployment Centre
• HP Device Manager
• Citrix virtualisation software

Our partners support

Benefits

Flexibility and speed are required
Although Indekeu obviously follows market trends and keeps his options open, he does not like to change his initial decisions: "There is always a vendor that can offer me cheaper thin client options. But that will create problems with our in-house standardisation. We keep our preferred IT suppliers on their toes of course, but we also certainly take other things into account. LNS distinguishes itself, for example, with their great flexibility and the speed at which they adapt. When we request a quote we often have it on our desk on the same day. This is important, to ensure that our internal processes are kept going."

The long relationship between H.Essers and LNS contributes to the fact that they can anticipate our needs. "We regularly review the overall situation with each other. We are used to rapid change, if we plan to open two new warehouses in the coming three months, consultation with LNS about the possibilities is important to ensure that they have time to react." Indekeu notes with satisfaction, "We notice that we also enjoy priority - as they ensure that there is always stock available and that we get it fast."

"Standardisation and automation are our greatest strengths. Flexible partners, reliable equipment and software along with prompt services are essential."

– Ivar Indekeu, IT infrastructure manager, H.Essers

Good prospects
H.Essers has experienced double-digit growth in the past decade. Other companies within the category were acquired, for example in Germany and Denmark. New markets are being tapped and new activities deployed, such as for Nike, which now also entrusts its external storage in Belgium to H.Essers. A warehouse of 25,000 square metres is used to effectively manage their inventory of 20 million shoes per year. The forecasts for the next five years are unremittingly optimistic. There are plans afoot to expand the existing pharmaceutical warehouses in Genk, which currently occupy some 40,000 square metres, to a total of 70,000 square metres of temperature-controlled warehousing. Indekeu views the ICT challenges associated with this growth with confidence: "Standardisation and automation are our greatest strengths. Flexible partners, reliable equipment and software, and prompt services are essential."

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