

System security is key to business continuity

Costcutter

Costcutter Supermarkets Group Ltd processes 25,000 invoices a week on an Oracle-based invoicing system. This system is so comprehensive and effective that any small amount of downtime could have a serious impact on the business. Costcutter has now developed this system to ensure business continuity, guarantee zero data loss and maximise cash flow.



Technical and non-technical events, such as systems crashes, component failures, natural disasters and criminal acts can prove fatal for many organisations that rely on IT to keep the business coming in and invoices going out. This is, no doubt, why technology purchasing decision makers cite disaster recovery and business continuity as among their top five IT priorities.

Retailers are one group who rely heavily on IT systems to control daily business operations such as stock ordering and invoicing.

Independent retail group Costcutter believes its recent rapid growth has been ably supported by an impressive Oracle-based invoicing system. The system has been specifically designed to cope with the company's requirements to turn around 25,000 invoices within a week, and therefore, any downtime is perceived as a serious threat to business continuity.

Costcutter

Costcutter, a national independent retail group operating throughout the UK and Ireland, believes its computerised system of processing invoices and delivering goods to over 1,000 stores means it is uniquely placed in the market. The system has resulted in an impressive rate of expansion for the group since it was established in 1986.

"We can enhance profitability and sales performance in-store by offering the widest range of products at the most competitive price – all delivered directly to your door. We also offer retailers the freedom and flexibility to retain their independence, something which is unique to the market," said Colin Graves, Chairman and Managing Director of Costcutter Supermarkets Group Ltd.

Kevin Widdrington, IT Manager at Costcutter, explained: "Our business relies on an Oracle-based invoicing system which enables us to process thousands of invoices a week. As with most retail organisations, our ability to turn around orders and invoices is crucial. If we can't do it, we go out of business.

"We act as a hub for hundreds of suppliers who do business directly with our many franchises, and who then send invoices directly to us at Head Office. It's a collapsed system which works very efficiently for all parties concerned."

Esteem Systems

IT systems solutions provider, Esteem Systems, has a track record of delivering cost-effective tailored solutions designed to fulfil specific business requirements within the commercial sector. Sun Microsystems Reseller of the Year 2001, Esteem has developed a close working relationship with Costcutter. Through proactive account management and a thorough understanding of both the latest technology and the commercial market, Costcutter in hand with Esteem have now managed to implement a fail-safe environment.

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E-Mail: costcutter@esteem.co.uk Web Site: www.esteem.co.uk

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Communication

David Ogden, Head of Esteem's team of Oracle experts, said: "The Oracle-based system worked extremely efficiently and, through working closely with the team at Costcutter, we were able to offer relevant advice to help them improve the system further."

"Esteem's knowledge of Oracle, combined with their ability to get to grips with our business and the way we do things, made them the perfect partner to take the invoicing system to the next stage of development. A risk analysis revealed that the collapsed system was so efficient that any downtime posed a serious threat so we were keen to start moving things forward," said Kevin Widdrington.

Reliable system solution

Esteem proposed a database recovery system with the combined advantages of continuity of service and zero data loss.

Esteem's solution comprised a Sun Microsystems E450 server, to backup the live machine throughout the day, and training of Costcutter personnel so that in the event of a systems failure, they would be able to take control immediately instead of waiting for an engineer. In the event of a system failure, the new infrastructure would dramatically reduce the disruption to daily business operations.

"The new Oracle-based infrastructure enabled Costcutter to make full use of the functionality of the Oracle Dataguard software, already inherent within the Oracle database software, while our experience of Oracle licences enabled us to look into their current structure and advise them of the most cost-effective migration path," explained David Ogden.

Business continuity

The new Oracle-based infrastructure ensures that in the event of a systems failure, users are re-routed to the backup server which is continually updated using the Oracle Dataguard software. During the course of a working week, Costcutter's administration team process in the region of 25,000 invoices and so the time pressures on personnel can be enormous.

Kevin Widdrington explained: "The new system offers us a fail-safe solution to systems crashes when downtime can cause serious disruption. We estimate that we will now be able to recover from a system failure within a matter of minutes."

Future

Costcutter continues to develop its internal IT systems to enhance the efficiency and security of the Oracle-based invoicing system. The company continues to work in partnership with Esteem Systems on future development plans.



CASE STUDY

