Sporting Goods Company Ups Its Game with Google App Engine

At a Glance

What they wanted to do

- Replace an aging ERP system
- Avoid installing and maintaining servers
- Gain a robust, flexible platform that allows developers to easily make changes to the system

What they did

- Relied on Google App Engine to build the system quickly and easily
- Used key App Engine features, such as Task Queues and the Blobstore, to smooth order processing and serve product images to suppliers
- Deployed new versions of the ERP software twice each week by quickly testing and adding new features

What they accomplished

- Reduced shipping costs for some orders by up to 40% by scheduling shipments more efficiently
- Reduced the number of on-premises servers by more than 75%, saving about $80,000 per year in hardware and operating costs
- Freed IT staff members from managing infrastructure so they could focus on improving the system

Organization

HUDORA, one of Germany's leading sporting goods manufacturers and wholesalers, turned to Google App Engine to improve resource planning, streamline operations and reduce costs. Company executives knew their choice of technology would be critical as they replaced an aging enterprise resource planning (ERP) system. Google App Engine enabled HUDORA's developers to build a scalable platform that has helped employees manage orders more efficiently and reduce shipping costs by up to 40%.

Challenge

HUDORA co-owner Maximillian Dornseif knew a more flexible ERP system could significantly increase his company's efficiency and help lower costs. Employees couldn't change orders once they had been entered into the existing in-house system, which led to time-consuming workarounds. It was also difficult to spot opportunities to save money – for example, by grouping orders from the same customer into one shipment.

Dornseif also wanted to avoid the expense of building and managing a new in-house system. He explored several infrastructure-as-a-service solutions but realized that setting up and maintaining servers would be cumbersome for his small IT team. Instead, he hoped to find an easy-to-manage platform that would allow his staff to focus on improving resource planning and allocation.

Solution

Dornseif's team had used Google App Engine to build a few internal applications and knew it would be ideal to host the new ERP software. App Engine was powerful enough to support the system's complex functionality and flexible enough to permit developers to update the software as needed. The platform also allowed team members to work quickly: Once they wrote the ERP code, building the system took just a few weeks.

"Google App Engine has allowed us to build high-quality software in a more agile way than we could before, without devoting resources to infrastructure issues. In my mind, there is no competition."
—Maximillian Dornseif, co-owner, HUDORA

"We wouldn't have been able to develop such a complex system as fast on in-house servers or with an infrastructure-as-a-service offering," Dornseif explains. "Google App Engine gave us a complete server management package, so all we had to do was build the service."

About Google App Engine

Google App Engine enables businesses to build and host web apps on the same systems that power Google applications. It offers fast development and deployment, effortless scalability and simple administration, with no need to worry about hardware, patches or backups.

For more information, visit
http://cloud.google.com/appengine

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The developers relied on several App Engine features to improve the system. Among them, Task Queues help the software process orders smoothly and identify any problems. The Blobstore, which holds large application files, allows the system to display images to HUDORA'S factories overseas, ensuring incoming products are correct.

With the old ERP system, it took months for HUDORA's developers to deploy some new software versions. They now can update software twice a week by running a production version and a new version simultaneously on App Engine.

"Running two versions in-house would have required a lot more manpower and a lot more servers," Dornseif says. "Google App Engine allows us to add new features quickly, which makes us more agile as a company."

Results

After launching the new ERP system, HUDORA has reduced shipping costs by up to 40% for some orders. Google App Engine makes it easy for Dornseif's team to fine-tune shipment scheduling, which has helped streamline invoicing and bookkeeping.

The company is also saving money on infrastructure. Since it began using App Engine in 2010, its number of on-premises servers has dropped from 25 to six, eliminating about $80,000 per year in hardware and operating costs. With less hardware to manage, Dornseif's team can focus its attention on improving the system.

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