



Kakira Sugar

Crystallises expansion with IBM virtual infrastructure from 365i Technology

Overview

Customer challenge

Undergoing a rapid expansion of its business, Kakira Sugar Works needed a robust and flexible IT infrastructure on which to run new ERP and database applications. Operating in Uganda, Kakira needed a technical infrastructure which was efficient and resilient in its use of fluctuating power supplies, and low cost to install and extend. With limited IT resources and capabilities, Kakira sought to establish a co-operative relationship with an organisation able to provide remote help and maintenance, and willing to train and transfer knowledge to staff in Uganda.

Solution

Kakira appointed 365i Technology from a competitive tender to design and implement a new IT infrastructure. 365i Technology recommended IBM BladeCenter® and VMware virtualisation software to create a Virtual Desktop Infrastructure, which it thoroughly tested in the UK prior to installation in Uganda. Comprehensive training was provided to Kakira IT staff and users, and knowledge transferred readily by 365i Technology specialists. Full remote monitoring and diagnostic services are provided on an ongoing basis from the UK and support visits made to Uganda when required.

Ugandan sugar producer, Kakira Sugar Works (1985) Ltd, is rapidly expanding its operations and commissioned UK-based 365i Technology to design and install a sophisticated IT environment to underpin its growth. Despite operating at a distance of over 3000 miles away, 365i Technology created a new infrastructure, built with the latest IBM BladeCenter and virtualisation technology, and installed it successfully at Kakira's facilities in Uganda. 365i Technology specialists trained local users, transferred knowledge to the local IT team and is providing high quality, on-going support.

Kakira Sugar, part of the Madhvani Group of Companies, is a major grower of cane on 9600 hectares of lush plantation on the banks of Uganda's Lake Victoria. The company crushes 5500 tons of cane a day and produces more than 140,000 tons of sugar each year.

The business is undergoing a major expansion programme which will dramatically increase the acreage of cane grown and multiply the tonnage of sugar being refined and packaged for market.

The growing complexity of Kakira Sugar's operations and the company's continual expansion called for more sophisticated manufacturing, management and financial systems. The company wanted information on production, processing operations, order processing and finance to be available to all relevant personnel from the cane plantations, across refining and manufacturing plants, to business management and finance.

“Kakira needs high powered software to keep a tight rein on operations, track cane deliveries and cane outgrower-suppliers, and a powerful relational database for management and financial accounting,” explains John De Souza, Director of Turner (London) Ltd, an associate company and an agent for Kakira Sugar in the UK. “The company chose to implement an Oracle database, SAP ERP systems and an AMS manufacturing application, selecting 365i Technology in a competitive tender to design and install a new IT infrastructure on which these applications would run. The installation has been successfully completed and a positive ongoing relationship has flourished. The new systems are currently being extended to a total of 170 users.”



Customer benefits

- A flexible modular infrastructure that facilitates systems expansion in line with business growth and technology evolution
 - A virtual environment that economises on server and workstation utilisation and costs
 - Robust servers and terminals with low energy consumption, sustainable under fluctuating power supplies
 - Co-operative, Internet-based remote support that ensures high availability of systems in Uganda
 - Comprehensive on-site technical and user training with extensive knowledge transfer to the local IT team.
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– Yogesh Prajapati, Financial Controller at Kakira

A sophisticated, modern IT infrastructure

Kakira had particular requirements for its hardware infrastructure. Initially 70 workstations were installed, with a further 110 following in a second phase. Two BladeCenter H Chassis with seven HS21/XM blades in each provided the processing power to deliver the applications to the user base. Slots are available in each chassis for future expansion.

Uganda does not enjoy the same quality of utility services as modern western economies. As a result, Kakira needs a robust infrastructure built at an economic cost with a minimum number of servers. The new systems have to be expandable so they can scale to accommodate the planned future growth in the company’s operations. They also have to be sustainable within a country with fluctuating power supplies and limited technical capabilities on the ground.

365i Technology recommended a virtualised infrastructure based on IBM BladeCenter and storage devices, and VMware virtualisation software to deliver services to up to 500 thin clients at the desktop. Kakira quickly saw that these technologies were a good fit with its requirements in the challenging environment in Uganda.

Specifically the need to purchase, update, repair, power-protect and replace 180 workstation-computers has been eliminated with the use of simple terminals. The cost of technical support to repair computers is high as are the associated costs of loading and updating software platforms, anti-virus software and application software. The cost of providing uninterruptible power supplies and voltage stabilisers for each computer-workstation has also been eliminated.

“We are operating in a country with limited local IT support and expertise, and at a great distance from manufacturing and technical support,” says Yogesh Prajapati, Financial Controller at Kakira Sugar. “The IBM BladeCenter and virtualised environment for workstations keeps the total cost of ownership low. They allow us to expand capacity quickly and easily, and facilitate easy maintenance through rapid component swapping.”

Low cost, efficient energy consumption

Since local power supplies are far from ideal with frequent fluctuations in voltage, the new systems have to be robust and consume power efficiently. Kakira has its own local power generation facility and sells excess capacity back to the National Grid.

The life expectancy of hardware is lower than in other parts of the world but, with the modular IBM infrastructure, Kakira is able to replace server components with relative ease and economy.

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“Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) technology is at the heart of the solution we delivered,” recalls Kevan Smith, Sales Manager at 365i Technology. “It delivers power savings of approximately 80 per cent over traditional standalone PCs. IBM BladeCenter, shared storage and VDI technology provide Kakira with a high degree of availability at comparatively low cost. The new infrastructure also incorporates an automatic back up facility for instant recovery in the case of any disaster affecting the main systems.”

Distance no barrier

With the supplier and support services based over 3000 miles from the installation, great care was taken to ensure the initial implementation was as perfect as possible. 365i Technology ran extensive tests on the configuration in the UK before shipping to site, which minimised teething problems.

It was important that Kakira’s IT team was fully committed and confident in the new systems. 365i Technology dispatched specialists to Uganda to ensure that local IT staff and users were fully trained from the outset, and the support team makes maximum use of direct access into Kakira’s BladeCenters for remote monitoring, diagnostics, ongoing servicing and maintenance from the UK via a satellite link.

“BladeCenter, virtualisation and much of the other technology was new to our team,” says Prajapati of Kakira. “365i Technology did an excellent job in configuring and testing the initial installation.



We did have some challenges during installation and in the months immediately after but this is normal in any reasonably sophisticated IT installation. Most impressive has been the way in which the 365i Technology technical people have taken time to train our staff and readily transferred knowledge to them. They visit us in Uganda when required, and have constant access from the UK via the Internet to our servers and workstations for routine monitoring and troubleshooting. The relationship works well and we co-operate well together despite the distances involved.”



Benefits

For Kakira users, the transition to the new solutions has been more or less seamless. They access the new ERP solutions much as they used to use the standalone PCs on their desks. VDI technology is robust and users are able to share data more easily through the central servers, with the added security of automatic disaster recovery facilities.

“At a corporate level, we are achieving considerable cost savings, power savings and environmental gains through the use of ‘thin’ clients (terminals) at the desktop,” concludes Prajapati of Kakira. “The modular nature of our server infrastructure gives us the flexibility to expand our IT facilities in line with our business growth without large capital expenditure. The cycle of hardware replacement will be much easier to handle with our modular infrastructure.”

“Through our work with 365i Technology, we are training a new generation of Ugandan staff in new technologies – VMware, IBM BladeCenter, Oracle, Solaris and SAP. This is of great value to Kakira, and will also benefit the wider Ugandan economy and the individuals in their careers.”

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