Customer case
City of Ypres

inetum
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Positive digital flow

City of Ypres invests in NetApp smart storage

On the advice of IT partner Inetum-Realdolmen, the City of Ypres has replaced their existing storage infrastructure with a smart solution from NetApp. This is a better fit for both their current and future needs. "Furthermore, thanks to an existing framework agreement with the City of Bruges, we were able to obtain it very quickly and at a good price," says Dieter Bulcke, head of Ypres' IT department.

The history of computing is one of constant growth. For example, there's more data all the time. Inevitably, that data explosion means we keep expecting more of our computer systems as well. The City of Ypres is no exception to this rule. "At a certain point, we could tell our storage needs were evolving faster than our storage systems," says Dieter Bulcke. "The result was longer wait times for end users, such as our colleagues at various municipal departments, but also for residents and businesses who make use of our services by increasingly digital means."

Redundant data centers

The existing storage structure dated from a time when the Flemish Government was enforcing the implementation of an integrated municipal and PCSW administration. At the same time as this administrative reform, the City of Ypres moved many of its administrative and public services to a new administration center on the outskirts of the city. "In the old days, all municipal services were concentrated in the city center, such as in the Lakenhalle for instance," recollects Dieter Bulcke. "That's where our IT department was set up originally. Even now, we still maintain a data center there."

The City of Ypres also made various significant changes to its internal organization and service provision at the time of the move. As the IT department needed to be able to support all these changes, they invested heavily in a short time frame, including in new servers and storage, for example. A second data center was established at several kilometers' distance from the first, which of course benefited operational continuity.

"We try to make things redundant wherever we can," emphasizes Dieter Bulcke. "While our former storage infrastructure already allowed for redundancy between the two data centers, that hasn't kept us from aiming for redundancy within the individual data centers as well." Before, the municipality relied on asynchronous data replication between the two sites. "That worked fairly well, but in the event of a disruption, manual intervention was still needed to restart things, requiring more time and a greater deployment of people and resources. That's why we wanted to strive for synchronous replication."

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> **DIETER BULCKE**
> **HEAD OF IT @ CITY OF YPRES**

Both speed and volume

While the new storage structure was intended primarily to improve performance and thereby enable people to work faster and more efficiently, storage capacity certainly played a role as well. "Even though capacity wasn't really a problem, when selecting a new storage system you do keep an eye out for adequate scalability in that respect," remarks Dieter Bulcke. "We've been transitioning towards more of a hybrid environment for a while now, making it especially relevant." So, the City of Ypres' new storage system also needed to offer sufficient scalability to allow for a move to the hybrid cloud, should the opportunity present itself.

With these crucial requirements in mind, Dieter Bulcke and his team decided to research the possibilities themselves a bit first, and then search for a suitable technology supplier and integration partner. "When we were exploring the options, we considered the possibility of a hyperconverged infrastructure as a solution. However, this wasn't a good idea as it stood, as it would also force us to update all the other elements of our infrastructure, such as our servers, in one go. That wasn't going to happen."

MetroCluster IP

Ultimately, the City of Ypres decided to limit itself to renewing its infrastructure. For the selection process, Ypres focused on three familiar IT partners, one of which was Inetum-Realdolmen. They ended up being the best choice, with a NetApp solution that guarantees continuous availability and optimal data redundancy: MetroCluster IP. NetApp's own ONTAP system manager is used to manage the solution.

Instead of traditional hard disks (HDD), MetroCluster IP relies on an all-flash array (AFA) with flash storage (SSD) only. As the name implies, writing to flash storage goes very fast. Moreover, no power is required for data preservation. "That means power failures have less of an impact," Dieter Bulcke points out. "This is another important advantage in historic buildings such as the Lakenhalle, where such disruptions are not unheard of. While previously manual intervention was required in such cases, we now get an instant failover thanks to the synchronous replication and the NetApp cluster's automatic features. It's fully automated, too. A simple click is also enough to trigger an instant failback and restore normal operations.That offers myself and my colleagues enormous peace of mind."

Intelligent data management solution

Thanks to built-in compression and deduplication techniques, NetApp solutions also provide for highly efficient storage. "NetApp generally works with a 3:1 efficiency rate. In other words, they only have to supply a third of the required capacity in practice," Dieter Bulcke explains. "Based on that expected efficiency, Inetum-Realdolmen and NetApp estimated the required amount of storage."

As the icing on the cake, NetApp guarantees additional drives free of charge if the capacity proves insufficient. "What makes NetApp special is that they're so much more than a storage system supplier," Dieter Bulcke concludes. "NetApp supplies intelligent data management solutions. They made us a promise, then supported that with a guarantee. And they definitely live up to it."

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