

# VIRGIN ONE MOVES FROM IBM TO SUN

## Success Stories



BUSINESS SYSTEMS INTERNATIONAL

### Blaze of glory – BSI's Sun Fire solution is a resounding success at Virgin One

Since its introduction in late 1997, new kid on the banking block, Virgin One, has revolutionised the traditional ways of banking, to become one of the top new mortgage lenders in the UK. However, the phenomenal success and growth of the company expedited the need to upgrade its original datacentre solution, and, in December 2001, the company successfully completed a major project to replace its IBM Sequent based IT infrastructure with a new solution from Sun Microsystems™. Owing to the skills of Sun™ reseller Business Systems International (BSI) – specialists in the supply and implementation of robust, high performance systems for continuous operation and 24-hour availability – and Consensus Consulting Ltd's IT and management consultancy expertise, the project was delivered on time and within budget.

Virgin One had originally planned to replace its system hardware in 2002. However, owing to a high level of sustained growth, the company decided to move from its datacentre in Norwich to the Royal Bank of Scotland's purpose built datacentre in Edinburgh. At around the same time, IBM was announcing that it would no longer be supporting the Sequent hardware platform, whilst Sun announced the availability of its new Sun Fire™ range of servers. The move to Edinburgh, coupled with these announcements, gave Virgin One the ideal opportunity to replace its hardware earlier than planned.

Jill Staines, one of Virgin One's IT Managers, takes up the story: "Everything just fell perfectly into place. Following IBM's announcement, we needed to source new replacement hardware for the datacentre, and, as we had been successfully running our e-commerce infrastructure on the Sun platform, Sun became our preferred choice. In addition, the new Sun Fire servers seemed to offer exactly what we were looking for – which was processing capacity at a reasonable price, the ability to scale up as business grows, and ease of management and maintenance."

### Sun Fire solution offers exactly what we need

The Sun solution chosen by Virgin One, and supplied by BSI, comprises 2 x Sun Fire 6800s in a cluster configuration, 2 x Sun Enterprise™ 450s and 6 x Sun Netra™ T1's, all running the Solaris™ 8 operating environment, together with associated system peripherals. The system runs Virgin One's own bespoke banking and call centre applications and an Oracle 8i database. The E450s provide a testing and development environment which enabled Virgin One to carry out partial migration on the smaller systems, whilst they were building the cluster of Sun Fire 6800s. The Sun Fire 6800s were delivered to the datacentre in the Royal Bank of Scotland, and the migration took place remotely from the Virgin offices in Norwich.

Having decided to replace its entire infrastructure, Virgin One turned to BSI to provide the specialist help it would need to

#### Industry:

- Finance

#### Applications:

- Virgin One's bespoke banking and call centre applications
- Oracle 8i database

#### Hardware/Software:

- 2 x Sun Fire™ 6800s
- 2 x Sun™ Enterprise™ 450s
- 6 x Sun Netra™ T1's
- Veritas Cluster & Oracle Database Edition
- Sun Solaris™ 8 operating environment
- 24x7 on-site support



#### Key Business Results:

- Sun Fire servers offer Virgin One high processing capacity, an excellent price-performance ratio, the ability to scale up as business grows, and ease of management and maintenance
- Business Systems International (BSI) and Consensus Consulting Limited worked side by side with Virgin One to provide full project management and installation services, including the migration of data and applications from an IBM Sequent based infrastructure to the new Sun solution
- BSI, Consensus and Virgin One's teamwork led to the project being delivered on time and within budget
- Sun solution has given Virgin One a robust, reliable platform with the processing capacity needed to support its business
- The additional capacity offered by the Sun solution has enabled Virgin One to enhance its existing applications and to develop new applications
- With the high levels of resilience built into the Sun system, Virgin One can confidently offer a 24x7 service to its client base
- The Sun platform offers significant potential to add more CPUs, memory and disks, thus providing an easy upgrade path for the future

create a migration path, to convert the system completely from IBM to Sun. Over the last 10 years, BSI has grown to be one of the largest European I.T. resellers, and has built a strong business based on trusted personal service and sound technological expertise. The company specialises in High Availability clustered solutions for mission critical applications.

By understanding both Virgin One's business and technical needs, BSI was able to add greater value by introducing specialist consultants, Consensus, one of the UK's leading independent Project Management and Consultancy businesses – and experts in the implementation and on-going support of mission critical systems for major UK and International companies. Together, BSI and Consensus were able to provide a team of installation specialists, migration specialists, project managers and consultants, who worked hand-in-hand with Virgin One's project team throughout the entire project.

"We've worked in partnership with Consensus on several occasions," comments BSI's Peter Hagenstein. "Consensus provide technical services and professional service skills to support our sales expertise and they've successfully completed similar migration projects for major blue chip companies, within some very demanding timeframes. We knew they would be the ideal partner to provide project management skills, as well as technical assistance with the build of the servers, planning the location and installation of the servers, and assistance with the migration of the database from Norwich to Edinburgh."

### The project went live on the exact date specified

Indeed, Virgin One, BSI and Consensus developed what was described as a 'virtual team', who worked so closely together that it was difficult at times to know who worked for which company. As Alan Henderson, one of Consensus' Principal Directors, explains: "We offered a high level of both technical and project management skills to ensure that the team delivered the exact solution required by Virgin One. It was a true partnership between Virgin One's IT personnel, ourselves and BSI – and we all worked extremely well together to deliver the solution successfully."

Jill Staines has been equally impressed with BSI and Consensus: "BSI adds both value and expertise. We have certainly benefited from having BSI and Consensus working side by side to provide not only the hardware solution, but also the project management and the technical assistance for the project. I felt that both companies were totally committed to the project, and to our exceedingly aggressive timescales – we had just four months to complete the project from purchase to implementation. We set an implementation date on day one of the project, and we went live on the exact date we had set.

"Even though the project became more complex during its life, and therefore much more demanding, BSI and Consensus kept rigidly to the original timeframe and ensured that all the



milestones were met. When any problems came up, we discussed them, and produced the work-around or solved the problems together. So we still went live on the planned weekend – and we've been delighted with the end result, which is enabling us to achieve our objectives.

### Sun system offers processing capacity and resilience

"The main benefits of the Sun solution are that it has given us a robust, reliable platform with the processing capacity we need to support our business. We were struggling to achieve this with our previous system, which could not cope with the company's extremely fast growth rate over the past 4 years. The additional capacity has also enabled us to enhance our existing applications and to develop new applications. And, owing to the high levels of resilience built into the system, we can confidently offer a 24x7 service.

"In addition to achieving significant update rates and much faster throughput, we have the ability to expand the system as we grow. We currently have 500 users on the system, and it also supports a high level of Internet usage. But we are still growing at a tremendous pace, so user numbers could easily double within a year. The Sun platform offers significant potential to add CPUs, memory, disks and so forth, thus providing an easy upgrade path for the future.

"Sun Microsystems is one of the leading providers of datacentre technology and has an excellent reputation in the marketplace for delivering robust hardware and operating systems. And it's certainly lived up to its reputation. The system was very straightforward to install – we didn't experience any major problems. We now have the system covered by Sun's SunSpectrum Platinum support, which is the highest level of support for 24-hour mission critical applications."

### Scalability for the future

Virgin One is very happy with its choice of a Sun solution, and is already planning further upgrades to cope with expansion. "There's plenty of scope to run more applications, and to increase the processing speed," concludes Jill. "We currently have 750MHz processors, which we can upgrade now to 900MHz CPUs, and beyond that, we could go up to 1.3GHz processors. And, if Virgin One continues to grow at the rate we have done over the past 4 years, that might be sooner than we expect."



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