



Business challenge

To convert fleeting fashion trends into sales, Clarks wanted to activate new channels and digital services rapidly—but found that existing systems could not support the volume and pace of change.

Transformation

To lay the foundation for omni-channel retail, Clarks moved its mission-critical SAP business systems to the SAP HANA® data platform, hosted in a private cloud based on IBM®Power® Systems.

Business benefits:

50%
increase in compute capacity with no rise in operational costs

90%
faster provisioning for digital services, cutting time to market for new channels

2x
boost in end-user application performance, supporting faster decision-making

Clarks Capturing fast-moving footwear fashion trends with responsive, omni-channel retail from IBM and SAP

Founded in 1825, [Clarks \(external link\)](#) is one of the UK's leading footwear brands. With more than 1,400 retail stores across North America, Western and Eastern Europe, India and China, Clarks employs 13,000 people and generates annual revenues equivalent to approximately USD1.9 billion.

“By deploying SAP Business Suite powered by SAP HANA in a high-performance private cloud, we are strengthening our ability to compete in the global retail market.”

John Caswell
Systems Manager
Clarks

Share this



Capturing fleeting opportunities

In fashion retail, time-to-market is more important than ever. Consumer trends can take off and fizzle out in a matter of weeks, and companies like Clarks—one of the UK’s leading footwear brands—must act quickly to capitalize on the opportunities.

John Caswell, Systems Manager at Clarks, explains, “Today’s customers expect the ability to purchase anytime, anywhere and on any connected device. To deliver on those expectations, it’s vital that we offer a seamless and responsive experience on every channel: whether it’s a retail store, website, social media platform or mobile app.”

Every customer is different, and to cater to each of them Clarks manages more than one million stock-keeping units (SKUs) for the styles, sizes and widths of its footwear products. To ensure the optimal assortments of products are available for sale on every channel, the company relies on SAP solutions to manage its production, planning and distribution processes.

“As our business needs have changed over the years, our SAP solutions have evolved with them,” John Caswell continues.

“For example, we moved from batch to real-time processing to offer instant stock-checking and next-day delivery. And to enable more efficient management of our global supply chain, we recently consolidated multiple international SAP deployments to a single global SAP instance for the entire business.”

Targeting shorter time-to-market

To compete effectively in an omni-channel retail environment, Clarks is under increasing pressure to activate new channels and digital services rapidly—but its existing SAP infrastructure was approaching capacity.

“With our SAP solutions running on a responsive, high-performance private cloud platform, we are in a strong position to build value-added services, integrate our data with new applications, and ultimately bring our products to market faster.”

Zoe Jones, Service Manager – SAP Applications, Clarks

“If one of our products explodes in popularity on social media, we need to make sure we can process a significant spike in orders in a short window of time,” comments John Caswell.

“Similarly, winning a new international distribution deal might hinge on our ability to build the necessary B2B integrations in just a matter of weeks. We knew that we were at the very limits of what our current infrastructure could deliver. To ensure that we could continue to serve the business effectively, we looked for a new platform.”

Embracing best-of-breed solutions

For many years, Clarks has relied on IBM Power Systems servers to support its most critical SAP business systems. To augment its omni-channel retail capabilities, Clarks decided to move to SAP Business Suite powered by SAP HANA, with SAP Business Warehouse for analytics and SAP Customer Activity Repository for loyalty-program reporting.

Based on the SAP HANA in-memory data platform, the new solution accelerates access to data and enables businesses to infuse real-time data insights into key workflows.

After a thorough evaluation of several infrastructure vendors, Clarks decided to deploy the new SAP Business Suite platform on high-performance [IBM Power Systems S814](#), [IBM Power Systems S824](#) and [IBM Power Systems E880C](#) servers connected to ultra-low latency [IBM FlashSystem®](#) storage, built on [IBM Spectrum® Virtualize](#). Configured as a private cloud, the new environment offers Clarks the agility, capacity and security to deploy new data-driven services at speed and global scale.

Jane Baker, Technical Specialist at Clarks, says, “We had already relied on IBM Power Systems servers to support our mission-critical SAP solutions for several years, and in all that time the platform never let us down. As well as being extremely confident in the quality and reliability of the IBM platform, we were very impressed by the performance enhancements of the IBM POWER8® processor architecture. Because IBM POWER8 processors are optimized for SAP HANA workloads, we gain a significant increase in compute performance within a compact footprint, helping us to boost compute capacity while keeping our operational costs flat.”

John Caswell adds, “We saw IBM FlashSystem storage and IBM POWER8-processor-based systems as the optimal combination to deliver a flexible, future-ready platform for our mission-critical SAP solutions. The close strategic alliance between IBM and SAP gave us the peace of mind that both solutions would be highly compatible, and the assurance of timely, effective support to overcome any technical challenges during the implementation.”

Streamlined deployment

Working with IBM Gold Business Partner Elyzium, Clarks deployed its new private cloud infrastructure. The solution is based on IBM Power Systems servers, with SAP HANA running on [SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for SAP Applications \(external link\)](#) and the SAP application servers running on [IBM AIX®](#). Virtualized with [IBM PowerVM®](#), the solution is replicated across two data centers for high availability, with ongoing support provided by a team from [IBM Services® \(Application Development and Management Services\)](#).



Zoe Jones, Service Manager – SAP Applications at Clarks, recalls, “We had been discussing our software license renewals with Elyzium, and it was one of those conversations that sparked this project. The combination of Elyzium and IBM proved to be a very effective partnership, and together we determined the optimal architecture, sizing, and implementation methodology for the new SAP solution.”

John Caswell comments, “The SAP Business Suite solution supports the entire global business, and it was crucial that the implementation and cutover went seamlessly. Working with Elyzium and IBM, we devised a robust process for managing risk throughout the project, which involved substantial testing in a non-production environment to refine our approach. Our careful preparation paid off, and we completed the deployment, testing and release process hours ahead of schedule—an achievement that won us plenty of compliments from the business.”

Gaining agility for growth

With SAP Business Suite powered by SAP HANA running on IBM Power Systems servers, Clarks has gained the agility to launch new digital channels and services rapidly, helping it to connect with more consumers around the world.

Mindaugas Liegus, IT Service Specialist – SAP BASIS at Clarks, explains, “By moving to a new generation of high-performance IBM Power Systems servers and IBM FlashSystem storage, we’ve boosted our available compute resources by 50 percent without any increase in costs.”

He continues, “This extra headroom is absolutely essential to build, test and deploy new services into production. Better still, our private cloud environment enables us to provision the necessary compute, storage and networking resources within minutes. These efficiencies mean we can now deliver services such as B2B integrations with new distributors in as little as one working day, up to 90 percent faster than before. Being able to deliver within these aggressive timeframes can be the difference between winning a major order and losing out on a sales opportunity, and we’re extremely pleased with the agility we’ve gained.”

Delivering innovative services, faster

Clarks is already harnessing its increased agility to accelerate the delivery of key innovation projects. “For the last two years, we have been supporting the business with the rollout of an automated merchandise financial planning solution, which promises to deliver a significant improvement in our operational efficiency,” explains John Caswell.

“In the final stages of the project, the business needed a variety of different test environments, some with live production data and some with static data. In the past, provisioning these environments to their specifications would have been a major project requiring weeks of work, but thanks to the new private cloud platform we got the environments up and running in less than a day. Today, we know we have the platform, the software and the people to respond rapidly to requests for innovation projects—boosting the value we deliver to the business.”

Striding ahead of the competition

Thanks to its IBM Power Systems servers, Clarks has boosted end-user SAP application performance by a factor of two, supporting faster, better-informed decision-making. And with access to elastic, burst-out capacity, the company has flexibility to move non-production workloads into the public cloud as its needs evolve.

“Clarks is going through a business transformation that aims to open up access to new markets and new customers,” comments Zoe Jones. “With our SAP solutions running on a responsive, high-performance private cloud platform, we are in a strong position to build value-added services, integrate our data with new applications, and ultimately bring our products to market faster.”

John Caswell concludes, “To thrive in an omni-channel marketplace, it is vital for us to understand our customers’ preferences and offer them a seamless retail journey. A flexible, cost-effective and high-performance IT infrastructure is the starting point for delivering on all these requirements. By deploying SAP Business Suite powered by SAP HANA in a high-performance private cloud, we are strengthening our ability to compete in the global retail market.”

“By moving to a new generation of high-performance IBM Power Systems servers and IBM FlashSystem storage, we’ve boosted our available compute resources by 50 percent without any increase in costs.”

Mindaugas Liegus, IT Service Specialist – SAP BASIS, Clarks

Solution components

- IBM® AIX®
- IBM FlashSystem®
- IBM Power® Systems S814
- IBM Power Systems E880C
- IBM Power Systems S824
- IBM PowerVM®
- IBM Services® (Application Development and Management Services)
- IBM Spectrum® Virtualize
- IBM Gold Business Partner Elyzium (external link)
- SAP Business Suite powered by SAP HANA®
- SAP Business Warehouse
- SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for SAP Applications (external link)

Take the next step

To learn more about the IBM SAP Alliance, please contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit: ibm.com/it-infrastructure/power/sap-hana

Established in 1998 and headquartered in Bolton, England, Elyzium is an IBM Gold Business Partner dedicated to delivering top-quality professional services and enterprise systems management solutions based on IBM software. To learn more about Elyzium, please visit: elyzium.co.uk

Connect with us



© Copyright IBM Corporation 2021, IBM Corporation, 1 New Orchard Road, Armonk, NY 10504 U.S.A. Produced in the United States of America, December 2020.

IBM, the IBM logo, ibm.com, AIX, IBM FlashSystem, IBM Services, IBM Spectrum, Power, POWER8, and PowerVM are trademarks of International Business Machines Corp., registered in many jurisdictions worldwide. Other product and service names might be trademarks of IBM or other companies. A current list of IBM trademarks is available on the Web at “Copyright and trademark information” at ibm.com/legal/copytrade.shtml.

Linux is a registered trademark of Linus Torvalds in the United States, other countries, or both.

This document is current as of the initial date of publication and may be changed by IBM at any time. Not all offerings are available in every country in which IBM operates.

The performance data and client examples cited are presented for illustrative purposes only. Actual performance results may vary depending on specific configurations and operating conditions. THE INFORMATION IN THIS DOCUMENT IS PROVIDED “AS IS” WITHOUT ANY WARRANTY, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING WITHOUT ANY WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY, FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE AND ANY WARRANTY OR CONDITION OF NON-INFRINGEMENT. IBM products are warranted according to the terms and conditions of the agreements under which they are provided.

The client is responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations applicable to it. IBM does not provide legal advice or represent or warrant that its services or products will ensure that the client is in compliance with any law or regulation.



20037420USEN-00