

PriceMinister

Supercharging storage to enable on-site vendors to rapidly update product catalogs and pricing

Overview

The need

To maintain its market-leading position, PriceMinister must provide a reliable and secure shopping experience combined with seamless updates to vast product catalogs and price lists at the back-end.

The solution

Deployed two IBM® FlashSystem™ arrays and virtualized their capacity using IBM System Storage® SAN Volume Controller, gaining a high-performance, high-availability storage landscape.

The benefit

Dramatic performance improvements, with some reports running 180 times faster. Faster updates to product catalogs and price lists mean better service to vendors. Hot system updates cut downtime.

Part of the Rakuten group, a major global e-commerce player, PriceMinister.com is a leading French online marketplace. It employs 250 people in France and offers more than 200 million new and used items for sale to a community of more than 20 million members.

Seeking optimal performance

To maintain its leading position in the French market, PriceMinister must provide a slick, reliable and secure shopping experience at the front-end, combined with rapid, seamless updates to vast product catalogs and price lists from numerous vendors at the back-end.

Patrice Boulanger, IT Production Director, PriceMinister, says: “PriceMinister is an intermediary for online buying and selling, so information technology is the lifeblood of our business. As our multi-terabyte Oracle production database grew, we needed to ensure that database performance would not become a bottleneck for overall site performance.”

As a test case for the main production database supporting the PriceMinister e-commerce site, the internal team looked at boosting the performance of its smaller Business Intelligence (BI) reporting environment. Here, users were free to build their own reports from aggregated data in a data warehouse, which made it extremely hard to optimize performance. As a result, some reports were taking two hours to generate – practically a lifetime in e-commerce terms – while others were simply timing out without completing.

Switching from spinning disks to all-flash storage could hardly have been easier or more effective, as Patrice Boulanger, IT Production Director at PriceMinister, explains: “We simply deployed the new FlashSystem array and migrated the data. Without any optimization at the database level, we saw an immediate and dramatic improvement in the speed of BI reporting.”



Solution components

Hardware

- IBM® FlashSystem™

Software

- IBM System Storage® SAN Volume Controller

IBM Business Partner

- INETD Consulting
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Says Patrice Boulanger, “We wanted a technical solution that would avoid the need to restructure our data – and flash storage was the obvious answer.”

Dramatic speed gains

PriceMinister deployed an IBM FlashSystem array to host its Oracle BI database. The jump in performance was startling, as Patrice Boulanger explains: “Some of the reports that previously took two hours to run were ready in just 40 seconds – that’s 180 times faster. IBM FlashSystem gave a phenomenal boost to our BI reporting, with no need to optimize the underlying database. As soon as we saw that the solution was also completely reliable, we migrated our production database to the same platform.”

As data volumes grew, PriceMinister wanted to mitigate the risk of having all business-critical data in a single place. After reviewing options from IBM and another major vendor, the retailer worked with IBM Business Partner INETD Consulting to add a second FlashSystem and to deploy IBM System Storage SAN Volume Controller to virtualize the capacity of both flash solutions.

“Our first FlashSystem had proven to be extremely reliable, but we didn’t want all our eggs in one basket,” says Patrice Boulanger. “Equally, we wanted a second system so we could do system updates without halting production. With SAN Volume Controller, we can simply move all transactions to one FlashSystem while we make updates on the other one.”

New competitive edge

The combination of FlashSystem and SAN Volume Controller ensures optimal performance at all times for the large Oracle databases that power PriceMinister’s business – the 5TB BI environment, and the 10TB production web database.

“Thanks in part to FlashSystem, the database is never likely to be a performance bottleneck for PriceMinister.com,” says Patrice Boulanger. “The tangible benefit is really the increased speed of services at the back-end. For example, we can import a vendor’s catalog, price updates or stock updates much faster. In a highly competitive market, that’s a big advantage, because it us helps to be a seamless part of our vendors’ business processes.”

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— Patrice Boulanger, IT Production Director,
PriceMinister

With no spinning disks to power, FlashSystem is also compact and highly cost-effective in operational terms. Patrice Boulanger concludes: “FlashSystem is a little box that does a great deal. It takes up minimal space in the data center, and its energy consumption is extremely low – so the cost per GB is highly competitive. And with SAN Volume Controller, our storage environment is very easy to manage, so we can spend less time on administration and more time on improving the end-user experience.”

For more information

To learn more about IBM solutions, contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following website:

ibm.com/storage/flash

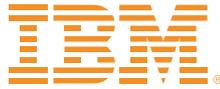
To learn more about INETD Consulting, visit:

www.inetd-consulting.com



For more information on PriceMinister, please visit

www.priceminister.com



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