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## Overview

### The need

Carrying out an average of one rental per second, business is booming at A-Plant. To maintain its expansion, the company set out to better manage exponential data growth and support 24/7 operations.

### The solution

A-Plant worked with MCS Global and Applied Technologies to lay the foundations for growth with next-generation IBM servers and storage, keeping business running efficiently around the clock.

### The benefit

Cutting response times by up to 89 percent and disaster recovery times by 80 percent, the solution helps A-Plant respond faster to customers at any time of day, driving revenues and company growth.

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## A-Plant

*Keeping pace as business booms to grow revenues and market share*

A-Plant forms part of FTSE-100 company Ashtead Group plc and is one of the UK's largest equipment rental companies, with a head office located in Warrington, Cheshire. With over 130 Service Centres nationwide, more than 2,400 employees and over 30,000 customers in the construction, industrial, infrastructure and events markets, the company invests millions of pounds each year in the latest equipment and technology.

### Hitting a wall

A-Plant's business is growing fast: it now carries out an average of 100,000 rentals each month, and has seen turnover double and profits triple over the last few years. To sustain this success, the company must stay ahead of the curve when it comes to managing exponential data growth.

Andy Wortley, IT Director at A-Plant, says: "People often rent rather than buy in times of recession, so recent years have been very good for A-Plant. When the business grows, our data grows too – we have seen it double in two years along with our user numbers. Each day, we take about 250 help calls from employees out in the field who cannot afford to wait long for a response. All of this puts pressure on our IT to run faster and more effectively."

Operating in a highly competitive, often time-critical industry, A-Plant must keep up with its customers. As a result, the company recently began operating 24-hour depots, making rapid response times and no interruptions to IT services more critical than ever.

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*"With the new solution, we can process new invoices coming into our systems whenever we like, rather than once a day. As a result, we have a better insight into performance, and can use this to respond faster to changes in the market, making us a more dynamic business," says Andy Wortley, IT Director at A-Plant.*

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## Solution components

- IBM® Storwize® V7000 Gen2
- IBM Flex System®
- IBM Real-time Compression™

## IBM Business Partner

- Applied Technologies
  - MCS Global
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“Each day, we need to process the payment invoices for approximately 90,000 items out for hire,” comments Wortley. “This used to take us between five and six hours and tied up our systems so much that we had to run the invoicing overnight. With the introduction of 24-hour Service Centres, we no longer had this nightly window to fall back on.”

## Thinking big

Initially, A-Plant planned to add disks to its existing virtualized storage infrastructure, based on IBM® Storwize® V7000, to cope with the influx of data. But it was MCS Global, A-Plant’s trusted technology advisor and specialized provider of software solutions to hire businesses, who suggested that there might be a better approach.

Wortley elaborates: “MCS are our trusted advisors, so when they told us about the benefits of Real-time Compression with IBM Storwize V7000 Gen2, we were intrigued, and rapidly convinced. It became clear that it was the answer to our data growth headaches.”

MCS partnered with Applied Technologies to deliver two IBM Storwize® V7000 Gen2 systems to A-Plant, each with 8TB of capacity. The company also chose to deploy a virtualized IBM Flex System® at each of its two datacenters. The sites are connected via Fibre Channel, with IBM Global Mirror and Metro Mirror software used to replicate data between the two datacenters in near real time.

The new solution has given A-Plant’s disaster recovery strategy a boost, as Wortley explains: “The combination of Storwize V7000 Gen2 and Flex System has enabled us to cut disaster recovery time from an hour to just ten minutes – an improvement of more than 80 percent. Now we are confident that our Service Centres should notice almost nothing in the unlikely event that one of our data centers fails, ensuring they can provide a consistently excellent service to customers at all times.”

## Re-using existing investments

Deploying the Storwize V7000 Gen2 has given A-Plant’s existing storage infrastructure a new lease of life. The company uses the solution to compress data before transferring it back to the older systems, freeing up resources. With help from MCS and Applied Technologies, A-Plant has been able to blend the new and old technologies with only a few minor bumps along the way.

“MCS and Applied Technologies have gone out of their way to ensure a smooth transition,” says Wortley. “When one of our older systems briefly stopped replicating and we needed a part that was not made any more, Applied Technologies were able to track one down and courier it over to us that same day.”

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*“We need to give customers pricing and availability for rentals straight away or risk losing them – with IBM solutions, we can respond rapidly, every time.”*

— Andy Wortley, IT Director, A-Plant

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### **Better use of resources, soaring performance**

A-Plant has dramatically increased utilization of resources with IBM Real-time Compression™, gaining the headroom it needs to accommodate future data growth. Enhancing efficiency in this way has not come at the cost of performance – on the contrary, the company has seen improvements to application performance across the board.

“The first time we completed our invoice run on our new Storwize V7000 Gen2 and Flex System environment, it was so fast we thought that it had crashed!” describes Wortley. “Instead of six hours, we can now process all daily invoices in just 40 minutes, an improvement of 89 percent.”

By enabling faster access to data, the solution helps A-Plant’s employees to work more efficiently, a key advantage in a highly competitive industry. The company no longer worries about being held back by technical limitations, and can focus on taking the business to new heights of success.

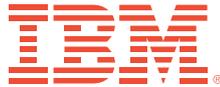
Wortley concludes: “Many of our systems run four times faster on the new solution. In the competitive marketplace that we work in, we need to give customers pricing and availability for rentals straight away or risk losing them – with IBM solutions, we are confident that we can respond rapidly, every time. This gives us a crucial edge on competitors, allowing us to seize new business opportunities to grow revenues and market share.”

### **For more information**

To learn more about IBM Storage solutions, contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following website: [ibm.com/storage/storwize](http://ibm.com/storage/storwize)

To learn more about products, services and solutions from Applied Technologies, please visit [www.applied-tech.co.uk](http://www.applied-tech.co.uk)

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