Wüstenrot

Cutting dev costs with Z Container Pricing while serving a new generation of customers with RESTful APIs

Wüstenrot is a leading financial services provider based in Salzburg, Austria. For more than 90 years, the group has delivered mutual savings and insurance services to Austrians. In recent years, Wüstenrot has expanded operations to Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary and Croatia. Today, the group serves over 2.2 million customers across Central and Eastern Europe.

Wüstenrot Datenservice GmbH provides IT services throughout the Wüstenrot group and is responsible for managing its IT applications, clients, data centers and network.

Business challenge
Eager to meet customer needs for convenient digital services, Wüstenrot wanted to remove the barriers preventing its developers from creating cool new web and mobile apps powered by the mainframe.

Transformation
Wüstenrot worked with IBM to implement IBM® z/OS® Connect Enterprise Edition in combination with innovative Container Pricing for IBM Z® to leverage mainframe applications and data via RESTful APIs.

“Business benefits:

Enables developers to build modern APIs using business systems and data on the mainframe

Boosts the agility of application development, cutting time-to-market for new services

Lowers the cost of running test and development workloads on the mainframe substantially

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CEO
Wüstenrot Datenservice GmbH
New paths to the customer

Gone are the days when you had to visit the local branch of your financial services provider to manage your money, mortgage or insurance. Today, more and more people are choosing to manage their finances via digital channels. Online and mobile services mean that it’s now possible to renew your home insurance from home and top up your savings account on the go.

Unsurprisingly, customers’ expectations of their banks, credit unions and insurers are changing fast. To keep pace with demand, Austrian financial services and insurance provider Wüstenrot aims to augment its existing online services portfolio with innovative new digital products and services.

Walter Svoboda, CEO of Wüstenrot Datenservice GmbH, the group’s IT services provider, says: “The biggest challenge for us is adapting our existing business applications to seamlessly support web and mobile platforms. Most of our core banking and insurance software is built on PL/I business logic specifically tailored to our IBM Z mainframe environment, a very different approach to the latest web and mobile technologies.”

To build more user-friendly, responsive web and mobile apps, Wüstenrot Datenservice GmbH recognized the need to adopt modern, simple application programming interfaces (APIs). However, the company also wanted to retain its highly efficient, proven PL/I applications, running on IBM z/OS on the group’s z13s server.

Empowering developers

As the first step in its drive for application modernization and to support the development of new web and mobile apps, Wüstenrot Datenservice GmbH decided to move to a RESTful API strategy for its web services.

Manuel Granbichler, Team Lead Systems Programming at Wüstenrot Datenservice GmbH, comments: “RESTful APIs have become the de facto standard for web APIs in recent years, so this was a natural progression for us. In our experience, using REST is easier for developers and requires less overhead compared to SOAP web service APIs, for example. This marks the beginning of not just a technical change, but also a cultural change for our developers.”
After a successful proof of concept by IBM, Wüstenrot Datenservice GmbH selected IBM z/OS Connect Enterprise Edition to facilitate the implementation of modern and simple APIs. The solution enables the company’s developers to create RESTful APIs while directly using business logic and data on IBM z/OS.

Walter Svoboda remarks: “IBM delivered a comprehensive proof of concept. The highly competent and knowledgeable team clearly demonstrated that IBM z/OS Connect was a perfect fit for us. Without IBM z/OS Connect, our medium-term strategy would have been to rewrite our business logic and APIs from scratch in Java. What’s more, finding people with the level of skill required in both PL/I and Java to make the transition would have been very difficult. Going down that path would have been very costly, slow and risky.”

IBM z/OS Connect Enterprise Edition gives web and mobile application developers at Wüstenrot Datenservice GmbH RESTful API access to z/OS applications. PL/I application developers are now empowered to set up APIs for core business data hosted on mainframe systems, including IBM Db2® databases.

To fully support the implementation of IBM z/OS Connect, Wüstenrot wanted a larger, higher capacity development and test environment. To achieve this, it is taking advantage of the Container Pricing for IBM Z Application Development and Test Solution. This innovative pricing option enables Wüstenrot to substantially increase its z/OS development and test environment capacity, without increasing MLC costs.

Walter Svoboda elaborates: “Because the mainframe is at the heart of our services, we run plenty of development and test workloads on the mainframe. The additional CPU usage would normally bump up overall costs. When we spoke to the IBM team about this, they suggested looking at Container Pricing for IBM Z to lower the cost of z/OS development and test environments. This new competitive pricing option was a game-changer for us and we are very happy with this cost-efficient offering.”

Boosting agility and economics on IBM Z

With IBM z/OS Connect Enterprise Edition, developers get direct access to mainframe applications and data through compact RESTful APIs. This approach eliminates the need for intermediate interfaces and data synchronization layers, which makes it the ideal starting point for building exciting new, real-time web and mobile services.

Walter Svoboda comments: “IBM z/OS Connect makes the systems and data in our IBM Z environment much more accessible, which will shorten the time to market for new apps and features considerably. This means that we will be able to react faster to changing business requirements and market trends, and deliver a better service to customers.”

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IBM z/OS Connect Enterprise Edition helps increase the agility of development teams and accelerates development lifecycles. Thanks to this solution, Wüstenrot can deliver simple REST APIs based on existing business logic on the mainframe. Crucially, the company can avoid spending time and money on rewriting complex application code in Java from scratch to support more flexible use of data and functionality in more modern user interfaces.

Manuel Granbichler says: “We’re just starting out with z/OS Connect and have already run a few pilot projects. We’ve been very impressed with the results so far. As one of our first projects, a team of developers built an internal web app as part of our new CRM solution that allows salespeople to access business and customer data stored on the mainframe via any device.

“Before, staff had to use a desktop or laptop to use a typical mainframe terminal interface. Now they can access the web app via any device, including smartphones or tablets. This new freedom is especially important for salespeople, making it more convenient to work and prepare for customer appointments on the go. Our new web and mobile apps are directly linked to the mainframe via RESTful APIs, so our employees always have access to the very latest data. We’re very much looking forward to using z/OS Connect to support more customer-facing apps soon as well.”

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The key enabler for the implementation of IBM z/OS Connect was the availability of the new Container Pricing for IBM Z, helping Wüstenrot to keep development costs under control. The groundbreaking software pricing alternative for IBM Z allows Wüstenrot to employ more agile development practices, and to establish more rigorous and comprehensive test processes much more cost-effectively. With this unique combination of tools and pricing, Wüstenrot Datenservice GmbH is well-positioned to create the easy-to-use digital products and services that staff and customers crave.

Walter Svoboda concludes: “IBM Z has been our strategic platform for core business processes for many years. It is great to see that the platform is continuously evolving. New technologies and offerings like IBM z/OS Connect and Container Pricing enable us to build state-of-the-art web and mobile apps with modern tools like Angular, a powerful JavaScript framework we use to create cutting-edge user experiences. We’re confident that IBM Z will remain at the heart of our IT for many more years to come.”