



Delivering digital services to millions of energy customers during the pandemic and beyond

Ecogas deploys SAP HANA 2.0 in a hybrid environment based on IBM Power10 servers, extending high-quality digital services to over one million people

In partnership with



8-minute read

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced Ecogas to suspend in-person services for its 1.4 million natural gas customers in Argentina, the company had to act fast to prepare for a surge in demand for its digital channels.

To empower every customer to complete key journeys online and on mobile, the company moved to the next-generation in-memory platform [SAP HANA® 2.0](#) running in a hybrid cloud



environment based on cutting-edge IBM® POWER9™ and [IBM Power10](#) servers, [IBM FlashSystem®](#) storage and [IBM Power® Systems Virtual Server](#) instances.

People across six provinces in Argentina rely on Ecogas to deliver natural gas directly to their homes. Operating under a mandate from the country's energy

regulator, the organization strives to provide reliable, convenient and affordable services.

Oscar Sobrero, Information Technology Leader at Ecogas, explains: “For a long time, in-person service channels were the primary touchpoints for energy customers in Argentina. Customers would visit local branches operated by

Ecogas to sign up for new services and notify us of a change of address, and attend their local bank or third-party collections office to pay their bills. We knew that digital channels could transform the customer experience, offering far greater speed and convenience for these journeys – so we embarked on a transformation.”

Over the past five years, Ecogas has developed seamless online and mobile service channels that allow customers to manage their accounts and pay bills. Pablo Contreras, Infrastructure and Telecommunications Leader at Ecogas, confirms: “Our digital channels were growing steadily, but many customers still preferred to engage with us in person, since that was what they were accustomed to. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020, we knew all of that was set to change.”

Boosts
compute
performance
by

35%

while reducing operational costs by 20%

Inspires

80%

of customers to use digital channels as their
primary touchpoint



In 2020, Argentina introduced measures to help contain the spread of COVID-19, including social distancing and local lockdowns. With in-person services suddenly inaccessible, digital channels became the primary customer touchpoint almost overnight.

Sobrero says: “We knew that there would be a big uptick in our online transaction volumes, as customers who previously relied on banks and collection networks to pay their bills turned to our digital channels instead. As well as supporting the surge in demand for online and mobile services, we also

aimed to allow customers to sign up for new contracts without coming into a branch — a capability we’d not yet rolled out.”

Previously, [Ecogas relied on SAP for Utilities on SAP HANA](#) to support its end-to-end business operations, running on IBM Power servers. With 4 TB of SAP HANA data growing at a rate of 20% year-on-year, the organization realized that its existing business systems and infrastructure would be unable to accommodate the projected increase in digital transaction volumes. To meet the new requirements, the

company decided to move to SAP HANA 2.0.

“As well as helping us tackle the near-term challenges of the pandemic, we saw that moving to SAP HANA 2.0 would bring many other long-term advantages,” adds Sobrero. “By offering the business real-time access to operational data, we could accelerate decision-making and free employees from time-consuming tasks. Moving to the next-generation data platform also promised to streamline important compliance activities, such as generating monthly reports for our regulator.”

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Oscar Sobrero, Information Technology Leader, Ecogas

Rapidly scaling up digital channels

To deliver on the compute and memory requirements for SAP HANA 2.0, Ecogas turned again to IBM. By combining the latest-generation IBM Power10 processor technology with ultra-low-latency IBM FlashSystem storage, the organization can help ensure high performance for SAP HANA 2.0 while creating substantial headroom for future data and transaction growth.

Alejandro Molina, Database and SAP Administration Leader, elaborates: “We carried out an extensive evaluation, which included IBM Power servers and x86 systems from a number of different vendors. As well as providing us with



the all-flash storage architecture we requested, IBM offered us a price to performance ratio that none of the equivalent x86 platforms could match.”

During the selection process, IBM Power10 servers had not yet been certified for SAP HANA 2.0. To prove the concept without delaying the

vendor evaluation process, IBM configured a cloud-based IBM POWER9 demonstration environment in IBM Power Systems Virtual Server to show that an IBM Power10 platform could meet and exceed the compute and memory requirements of the target SAP HANA 2.0 deployment.

Sobrero comments: “IBM is one of our most trusted IT partners. Based on the results of our proof of concept with IBM Power Systems Virtual Server and the close strategic alliance between IBM and SAP, we were left with no doubt that IBM Power10 is the optimal platform for our new SAP HANA 2.0 solution. We have such confidence in both companies that we actually signed the contract several months before IBM Power10 was certified by SAP.”

“Moving to SAP HANA 2.0 on IBM Power10 played a key role in allowing Ecogas to maintain high service levels throughout the pandemic. In fact, around 80% of our customers now use digital channels as their primary touchpoint — all enabled by our IBM and SAP solutions.”

Pablo Contreras, Infrastructure and Telecommunications
Leader, Ecogas



Working with [IBM Systems Lab Services](#) and its trusted IBM Business Partner The Computer, Ecogas deployed the new IT infrastructure. The company's new SAP HANA 2.0 production environment is based on a single [IBM Power E1080](#) server connected to [IBM FlashSystem 5200](#) storage, virtualized with [IBM PowerVM®](#) and running the [SUSE Linux® Enterprise Server \(SLES\)](#) for SAP Applications operating system. Contreras adds: "By selecting SLES for SAP Applications, we were confident we could deliver the resilience and availability to support our mission-critical SAP business systems."

Molina says: "It was a great experience working with The Computer and IBM Systems Lab Services on the implementation project. Our relationship with The Computer goes back many years — and the company was always willing to go beyond their contractual obligations to help us solve challenges and keep the deployment project on track."

To deliver robust disaster recovery capabilities, the company has created a hybrid environment that leverages [IBM Cloud®](#). Ecogas uses [IBM Spectrum® Protect](#) to replicate data

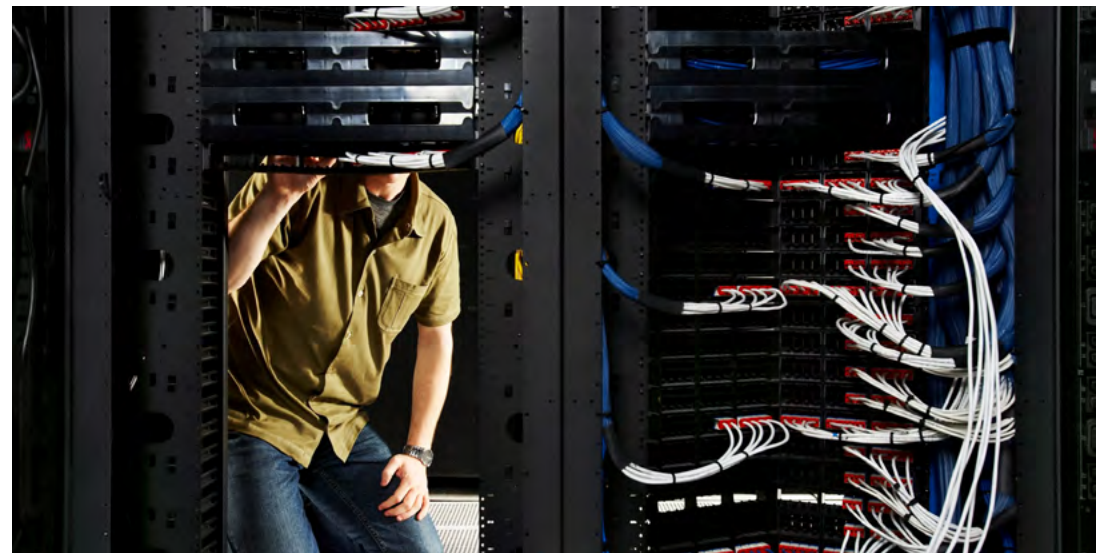
to an IBM Power Systems Virtual Server instance in near-real time, helping to minimize the risk of data loss or service disruption in the event of an issue at its primary data center.

Sobrero continues: "IBM went the extra mile to ensure we succeeded, leveraging their global expertise in IBM and SAP solutions to accelerate our deployment — all despite the ever-present challenges of Covid. Thanks to IBM and The Computer, we did in 60 days what might have taken other vendors four months to complete."

Building future-ready customer services

By moving to SAP HANA 2.0 on IBM Power10, Ecogas can support its customers with seamless digital services through the pandemic and beyond. The new solution has allowed the organization to reduce IT operational costs by 20% while boosting compute performance by 35% — empowering it to accommodate a massive increase in demand for digital services.

“Almost all our 1.4 million customers now receive their bills digitally rather than on paper, which is more convenient for the customer, more cost-effective for Ecogas, and more



sustainable for the environment,” says Sobrero. “In just a few months, adoption of digital billing shot through the roof, which is a testament to the excellent collaboration between IBM,

The Computer and Ecogas during the pandemic.”

Using e-signature workflows in the new SAP solution, the company has

shaped an entirely digital customer onboarding workflow. As a result, the organization offered a full service even while its branches were closed.

“Moving to SAP HANA 2.0 on IBM Power10 played a key role in allowing Ecogas to maintain high service levels throughout the pandemic,” says Contreras. “Most of our customers find the online and mobile channels so convenient that they prefer them to the in-branch experience. In fact, around 80% of our customers now use digital channels as their primary touchpoint — all enabled by our IBM and SAP solutions.”

The new business systems are also delivering advantages in other areas

of Ecogas. The company has real-time access to operational data in SAP HANA 2.0, which dramatically accelerates key reporting processes.

“Each month, we must deliver a billing report to our regulator, which previously took 30 hours to create,” comments Sobrero. “Since moving to SAP HANA 2.0 and IBM Power10, we can generate regulatory reports in just six hours — a time reduction of 80%. In total, we estimate that our back-office teams have accelerated report-building processes by 40%, which contributes significantly to our overall operational efficiency.”

Looking ahead, Ecogas plans to build on the successes of its ongoing digital

transformation. The company is exploring the possibility of moving more of its business systems to IBM Power Systems Virtual Server, and using [IBM Power Enterprise Pools 2.0](#) to dynamically and cost-effectively flex its on-premises compute resources to accommodate peaks in business volumes.

“By far the best aspects about partnering with IBM are their rock-solid solutions, excellent technical support and mature product roadmap,” concludes Sobrero. “IBM will be a key partner as we continue to enhance our digital services — and we look forward to bringing even higher-quality services to energy customers across Argentina.”



About Ecogas

Ecogas (external link) specializes in distributing natural gas to households and businesses across six provinces in Argentina. A regulated monopoly, the company serves 1.4 million customers via a distribution network spanning almost 30,000 km.

Solution components

- IBM® FlashSystem® 5200
- IBM Power® E1080
- IBM Power Enterprise Pools 2.0
- IBM PowerVM®
- IBM Power Systems Virtual Server
- IBM Spectrum® Protect
- IBM Systems Lab Services
- SAP HANA® 2
- SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for SAP Applications

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