



HILLARYS

Hillarys

Industry and Location
Retail and Manufacturing | United Kingdom

Product(s) and Service(s)
SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for SAP Applications
SUSE Manager

Hillarys selected SUSE Linux Enterprise Server for SAP Applications as a robust, reliable operating system for its upgraded SAP ERP landscape

Success Story

At-a-Glance

Hillarys is committed to providing consumers with a superior customer experience, but its IT systems were struggling to keep up. By selecting SUSE Linux Enterprise Server (SLES) for SAP Applications as the robust, reliable operating system for its upgraded SAP ERP landscape, the company has cut the time spent running the overnight data upload by more than 50%, and hugely accelerated its CRM system—improving customer service and ensuring the business runs smoothly.

Introducing Hillarys

Overview

Headquartered in Nottingham, Hillarys is the UK's leading retailer, manufacturer and distributor of made-to-measure window coverings, with a market share of 26% and annual turnover of £200 million. The company employs 1,350 people and manufactures 32,000 bespoke products per week, which it sells through its nation-wide network of 1,000 sales advisors, as well as online and through selected stores.

Challenge

Hillarys is committed to providing consumers with a superior customer experience and has led the way in using enterprise mobility to help achieve this since 2005 when sales advisors started using mobile applications to assist in home visits. However, after a decade or so of growth and ongoing service innovation, the company's



Figure 1: Julian Bond, Head of ICT at Hillarys

IT systems were starting to struggle to keep up.

Julian Bond, head of ICT at Hillarys, said: "Mobile devices are key to our business, generating around 80% of our turnover, so we need capable back-end systems to support them. We'd been using HP-UX and HP hardware for many years to run our SAP systems, with ECC5 as the ERP component of SAP's Business Suite for the last ten years. Not only was ECC5 coming to the end of its support, but limited system performance was impairing the capability of our mobile apps and restricting real-time web service integration—not to mention impeding key interactions of business users such as customer service.

"For example, our customer relationship management [CRM] system was far too slow—as a result, staff were finding ways to circumvent the system just to avoid using

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Julian Bond
Head of ICT
Hillarys

it! So instead of the CRM system aiding us in providing a great customer experience, it was more of a hindrance.

“In addition, we were struggling to fit the data warehouse nightly upload into the available time window, which was slowing down the business. We needed to move from batch to real-time processing to keep the business competitive.”

In order to accelerate customer service and give employees a more streamlined digital experience, Hillarys decided to upgrade from SAP ECC5 to SAP Business Suite powered by SAP HANA (SAP S/4HANA), a set of fully integrated applications running on the SAP HANA in-memory, real-time data platform.

“SAP S/4HANA offers enhanced speed and performance, enabling us to accelerate our enterprise mobility and take full advantage of new technology like SAP Fiori apps,” said Julian Bond. “However, moving to SAP S/4HANA meant that we needed to upgrade the rest of our IT infrastructure, including our operating system. The HP Ita-

nium processors in our existing equipment had become outdated and production SAP HANA systems need to run on an SAP Certified Appliance.

“We were very happy with HP-UX, but we needed to move to an operating system certified for the SAP HANA in-memory platform. Equally, trying to recruit people who had legacy HP-UX skills had become increasingly difficult, so we wanted a more modern platform that would also give us more flexibility around hardware platform choice—without sacrificing the bullet-proof reliability that we’d been used to.”

Solution

Hillarys decided to move to a flexible, open-source operating system to support SAP S/4HANA, and selected SLES for SAP Applications, the leading operating environment for SAP environments.

Julian Bond said: “At the time our choices were SUSE or Red Hat, and after evaluating both options we felt that SLES for SAP Applications offered clear strategic advantages

“With SUSE underpinning the SAP solutions that are key to our business, we have a high-performing and scalable environment that allows us to exploit growth opportunities and continue to provide our customers with excellent service.”

Julian Bond
Head of ICT
Hillarys

in terms of the strong relationship between SUSE and SAP.”

SLES for SAP Applications is performance-optimized and configured to provide the best possible support for SAP applications and is regularly updated with new optimizations as SAP releases new versions of its products. As an open source platform, it provides flexibility, manageability, and cost-effectiveness.

Leading the way

Moreover, Hillarys broke new ground by being the first company to deploy version 12 of SLES in support of an SAP landscape. Julian Bond said: “Version 12 hadn’t quite completed SAP’s prolonged certification process at the decision point in our project, but the performance and functionality advantages, alongside the confidence that we have been able to build in the robustness and support of SUSE solutions, meant that the reward justified the risk. In particular, we were attracted to the enhanced scalability of the solution compared to previous versions.

“We encountered some issues during the migration to version 12 of SUSE Linux Enter-

prise Server for SAP Applications, but the SUSE technical team got involved, demonstrated their expertise, and showed real awareness of the significance of our project. It’s during challenging times that you really see the strength and depth of a technical partnership, and SUSE successfully worked with us to get the solution up and running as quickly as possible.”

With the solution in place, Hillarys uses the Page Cache Management feature in SLES for SAP Applications to ensure high performance when working on large SAP HANA workloads. Normally, the Linux kernel frees up rarely accessed application memory pages and uses them as a general-purpose cache to improve overall system performance. As many SAP applications require rapid access to data, potentially including data that is accessed relatively infrequently, this can cause unacceptable delays as the system needs to keep going back to disk and reloading the cached-out memory pages. With the SUSE Page Cache Management feature in place, the Linux kernel is limited in the amount of cache memory it can use and application memory is prioritized, helping to keep response times as fast as possible for SAP users and

applications.

Transforming the business

When first thinking about the architecture of its new SAP HANA landscape, Hillarys had considered a software-as-a-service approach: running the solution in SAP's own cloud. After weighing the relative merits of the private and public cloud, the company decided to keep its SAP solutions in its own data center.

"At the point at which we had to make a decision, SAP's public cloud offering was only just announced—it not only felt slightly too bleeding edge, but also missed some key business functionality such as the Variant Configuration central to supplying 35,000 unique products each week," said Julian Bond. "We also have extensive SAP NetWeaver Process Integration integrations in place on-premise, and attempting to migrate these to SAP HANA Cloud Integration [HCI] would have added significant risk to the project.

"In addition, the bulk of our employees are based in Nottingham on a local area network, so moving to the public cloud doesn't offer us the same benefits it might to a more global, distributed organization. We didn't want to have the additional latency associated with running on the public cloud."

The company chose Huawei x86 servers on which to run its new SAP HANA landscape.

Julian Bond said, "Huawei made a compelling proposition—they offered a high level of support and demonstrated a great deal of enthusiasm to make the project successful."

Hillarys understood that making such sig-

nificant changes to its IT architecture also required accompanying cultural change across the company.

"We used an experienced SAP Partner to assist us but a key goal was to ensure that our in-house IT team was fully involved during the migration, with essential knowledge and skills transferred throughout the project," said Julian Bond. "As Linux was unfamiliar to our team, we started the process of building expertise early. In fact, we trained staff to use SLES a year in advance of making the full migration, allowing enough time for individuals to achieve certification before the migration project started in earnest, as part of ensuring they were on board and up to speed. Limiting our dependence on external third parties helped ensure that the project was a cultural success as well as a technical success, and this means that we have the in-house skills to keep supporting and developing the environment. Indeed, the success of the upgrade project has been recognized, winning an SAP Quality Award in the Fast Delivery category."

Results

Today, with SLES for SAP Applications supporting its SAP environment on Huawei hardware, Hillarys has hugely accelerated its CRM system—re-engaging user commitment, stopping staff from working around it, and improving the customer experience.

Julian Bond said: "The combination of SUSE Linux Enterprise Servers for SAP Applications, SAP HANA and the Huawei hardware has completely revitalized our CRM system, delivering phenomenal performance improvements. It could sometimes take minutes to bring up a customer's details on

screen if they rang with an issue, which was an embarrassing delay for our agents, and inconvenient and frustrating for customers.

“Now that we have migrated from Oracle Database to SAP HANA, accessing all of a customer’s details and history is almost instantaneous. This improved responsiveness has helped lead to a markedly enhanced customer experience, with improved first-call resolution and a noticeable reduction in complaints. By providing a faster, better level of service, we can nip issues in the bud before they become complaints.”

Accelerating and streamlining

The new IT infrastructure has significantly sped up Hillarys’ overnight data upload processes, getting new sales data into the data warehouse faster so that business analysts can report, analyze and act on information more quickly.

“Previously, we were struggling to fit the SAP Business Warehouse nightly upload into the available time window—but with SAP HANA in place, the overnight upload takes between a third to half of the time,” said Julian Bond.

“This acceleration allows us to feed some of our reports to external agencies, and make faster marketing decisions, resulting in greater customer engagement. For example, we run a process where, based on the outcome of different customer interactions, we might decide to send them some communication such as a text or direct mail. Because the overnight upload now takes less time to run and we can make sense of the data sooner, we are able to run that process a whole day earlier, enabling us to capitalize on sales opportunities and ensure that

we deliver the most responsive service we can.

“The overall solution has also accelerated reporting in other areas. For instance, our accounts team runs a monthly report for government statistics which would have taken 20 minutes to run on the old infrastructure, and now runs in a matter of seconds. All of this saves time and effort, enables faster decision-making, and streamlines the business.”

Boosting robustness

Hillarys’ business has already benefited from highly available and consistently fast systems since migrating its SAP environment to SAP HANA, thanks in part to the high level of robustness and reliability provided by SLES for SAP Applications.

Julian Bond said: “Our business depends completely on the SAP environment, so having an OS that is always up is fundamental. To be honest, we hadn’t expected SUSE Linux Enterprise Server to offer the same high level of reliability that we’d enjoyed with HP-UX, but it has absolutely delivered.

“The SUSE solution works seamlessly with VMware virtualization, so we can respond rapidly and flexibly to any hardware failures by restarting the impacted virtual servers on other physical machines. This also helps us to perform scheduled hardware maintenance or upgrades. It is SLES for SAP Applications that provides the fast, reliable and scalable environment that is essential for our business-critical SAP S/4HANA systems—ensuring that we’re able to consistently run our business and serve our customers, without any IT issues getting in the way.”

Striding ahead

Since going live with SAP S/4HANA running on SLES for SAP Applications, Hillarys has also deployed SUSE Manager.

“We’ve been so impressed with the success of the SUSE solution that we have made it our policy to further build on our partnership with SUSE,” said Julian Bond. “SUSE Manager has helped us to understand and manage our new IT landscape and resolve outages more quickly.

“Looking to the future, we want to take advantage of SUSE’s expanding product portfolio and continue broadening the partnership. With SUSE underpinning the SAP solutions that are key to our business, we have a high-performing and scalable environment that allows us to exploit growth opportunities and continue to provide our customers with excellent service.”

Benefits

- Accelerates CRM system, enhancing customer experience with reduced call times and better first-call resolution.
- Cuts the time spent running overnight data upload by more than 50%, enabling timely reports.
- Delivers superior levels of robustness and reliability, ensuring that the business continues running smoothly.
- Reports now take seconds to generate, compared to 20 minutes.

Find out how SUSE can help you become an innovation hero!

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