Tech distributor handles 5X sales peaks with all-flash solution from IBM and Northdoor

"Northdoor had the technical skills to recognise that we could achieve our performance goals in a more targeted and cost-efficient way by refreshing the storage elements."

Customer spokesperson

- 5x increase in sales volumes handled seamlessly
- Rapid ROI through increased ability to handle peak sales periods
- Avoided major reinvestment in server hardware by boosting storage performance

About the customer

This is one of the largest and fastest growing technology distribution and specialist service providers in Europe. Working with hundreds of global technology brands and over tens of thousands of retailers, the company has specialist sales and technical teams focused on solutions ranging from enterprise, IT and AV to mobile and gaming.

Growing pains

As one of the largest and fastest-growing technology distributors and specialist service providers in Europe, this Northdoor customer wanted to prepare its systems for further success. In particular, the company knew that 'Black Friday' — the retail peak after the US Thanksgiving holiday — was rapidly growing in importance in Europe, and that its business systems would need to cope with increasingly large peaks in demand as a result.

A customer spokesperson comments: "Both through organic growth and acquisitions, our business has been expanding quickly. We wanted to be prepared for the coming Black Friday peak, so that we could serve a growing number of customers rapidly and effectively."

To ensure that it could keep reliably delivering stock to its huge network of retail partners even at the busiest times, the company undertook a review of the physical infrastructure supporting its core systems, which run on the IBM AIX operating system on IBM Power Systems servers. During peak sales periods, system response times were becoming so degraded that the database was timing out and causing core applications to crash.

"We wanted to refresh our IT infrastructure to ensure great performance even in the face of enormous sales peaks," recalls the spokesperson. "We called in Northdoor to help analyse our requirements and determine the optimal solution."

Platinum Business Partner

IBM.

northdoor
◦ Store IT ◦ Protect IT ◦ Use IT ◦

"Northdoor helped us make a highly targeted investment and keep sweating the existing assets."

Customer spokesperson

Targeted solution

Northdoor — an IBM Platinum Business Partner with Specialist status in Power and Expert status in Storage — modelled the likely peak workload and designed a new solution that would be able to manage it.

Following a detailed modelling exercise in which Northdoor simulated the Black Friday workload to test its proposal, the customer replaced its existing enterprise disk systems with two all-flash IBM FlashSystem 5030 systems. The company was already familiar with IBM Spectrum Virtualize, and accustomed to the exceptional flexibility, value and ease of use that it brings.

"We were delighted to be able to protect our existing investment in Power Systems servers," says the spokesperson. "The easy — and more costly — option for increasing our performance headroom would have been just to throw the latest POWER CPUs at the problem, but Northdoor had the technical skills to recognise that we could achieve our performance goals in a more targeted and cost-efficient way by refreshing the storage elements."

Northdoor meticulously planned the delivery, installation and migration of data to the new FlashSystem systems to keep risk to a minimum, then successfully executed the move. "The careful work that Northdoor did up-front meant that everything ran smoothly," recalls the spokesperson. "It was critically important to complete the migration before Black Friday so that we could fully capitalise on that opportunity. With the FlashSystem 5030 systems in place before the deadline, we were able to cope with a five-times increase in sales volumes without missing a beat."

Rapid return on investment

The FlashSystem solution deployed by Northdoor proved its value within the first week of deployment, coping effortlessly with the extreme demands of Black Friday. "The difference with all-flash storage is like night and day and has even allowed us to drop down a model range in the portfolio," says the spokesperson. "The solution paid for itself in no time at all, by enabling us to handle the increased sales volumes and profit from the sales opportunity that Black Friday presented."

In addition to increasing the performance of core business systems, the FlashSystem 5030 arrays are physically smaller than the enterprise disk systems they replaced and have a much-reduced energy footprint. "We're now using less power and have a smaller rack footprint in our data centres, which translates directly into ongoing cost savings versus the previous storage solution," says the spokesperson.

For peak workloads — not only Black Friday and Christmas, but also end-of-day, end-of-month, end-of-quarter and end-of-year processing — the new FlashSystem arrays have the performance and throughput to keep core applications running smoothly. This also means the company is getting better value from its existing Power Systems servers, which are no longer waiting for data at peak times.

The spokesperson concludes: "Northdoor helped us make a highly targeted investment and keep sweating the existing assets. From the perspective of our business, the solution enables us to make sure we're ready to serve customers rapidly however high the levels of demand. For our customers, this means fast, reliable, cost-effective service at all times."

Platinum Business Partner

IBM®