

bluecycle.com opens e-horizons for UK's largest insurer

Success story



“With our clustered solution from HP and Oracle,” we have a resilient, flexible and scalable IT infrastructure that enables us to meet increasingly complex SLAs without adding personnel or making major upgrades”.

– Keith Misson, chief technology officer,
bluecycle.com.



Challenge

To identify an IT infrastructure as dynamic as Bluecycle.com's business model.

While requiring higher performance to support its expanding businesses, bluecycle.com also sought an economical alternative to the big-box upgrade proposed by Sun.

Solution

- Certified Configuration from HP and Oracle comprising
 - Oracle9i Database with Real Application Clusters
 - Red Hat Enterprise Linux 2.1
 - HP ProLiant Parallel Database Cluster software
 - Two HP ProLiant DL580 database servers, each powered by dual Intel Pentium III Xeon processors
 - StorageWorks RA4100 Fiber Channel Storage Array
- HP solution architect advisory support and start-up consulting, including solution testing at HP Proof-of-Concept Centre in Birmingham, England.
- Back-up assistance from HP Parallel Database Cluster specialists.
- Hardware and software support with one call to either company under HP and Oracle Cooperative Support Agreement.

Business results

- ROI starts with \$130,000 upfront savings, continues with lower cost of ownership.
- Scalable, flexible solution efficiently manages spikes in business demand.
- E-business meets increasingly complex SLA without adding IT personnel.



bluecycle.com [www.bluecycle.com] is a subsidiary of Norwich Union, the number-one insurance provider in the UK and a wholly owned subsidiary of Aviva plc, the seventh-largest insurer in the world. The same high customer-service standards that drive Norwich Union also propel the insurance giant's e-commerce venture.

bluecycle.com's convenient, fast online auction for salvaged automobiles is the largest business of its kind in the UK, selling many thousands of write-off vehicles per year to registered dealers, who repair these vehicles for resale or dismantle them for parts.

bluecycle.com's e-Claims business rapidly sources replacement vehicles for insurance claims; and its electronic tendering service supports Norwich Union's procurement processes.

Now, bluecycle.com is pioneering services that target markets beyond Norwich Union's installed base. A clustered solution from HP and Oracle provides an agile, cost-effective information technology (IT) foundation for bluecycle.com's expanding suite of businesses.

Replacing a Solaris-based Sun 450 server running Oracle8i Database is a Certified Configuration from HP and Oracle comprising: Oracle9i Database with Real Application Clusters on Red Hat Enterprise Linux 2.1; an HP ProLiant Parallel Database Cluster with two ProLiant DL580 servers, each powered by dual Intel Pentium III Xeon processors; and an HP StorageWorks RA4100 Fiber Channel Storage Array.

"We're trying to cross traditional boundaries within our enterprise," says Keith Misson, chief technology officer at bluecycle.com. "With innovative business processes and applications, we're leveraging our in-house capabilities to enhance services and create new revenue streams. Now, we can economically expand our infrastructure to match demand as more businesses come on line.

"With our clustered solution from HP and Oracle," Mr. Misson continues, "we have a resilient, flexible and scalable IT infrastructure that enables us to meet increasingly complex SLAs without adding personnel or making major upgrades. If tomorrow, we're asked to go UK-wide with a service, we have the IT agility to quickly and economically do so."

Freed from Sun's single-box bottleneck

As a successful e-business, bluecycle.com knows how to make a profit in an environment with unpredictable spikes and drops in demand. The company needed an IT infrastructure as dynamic as its business model. While requiring higher performance to support its expanding businesses, bluecycle.com also sought an economical alternative to the big-box upgrade proposed by Sun.

"Our existing Sun platform had become costly to run, scale and upgrade," says Mr. Misson, "and it imposed a single-box bottleneck. The clustered solution from HP and Oracle offered a more flexible way to handle surges in transaction volume."

The Oracle Real Applications Clusters configuration can be expanded and contracted as necessary, enabling bluecycle.com to align IT resources with fluctuations in demand and obtain maximum ROI.

Innovation—without risk

HP, Oracle and Intel partner to bring the economy and flexibility of industry-standard server technologies to enterprise-scale computing, enabling companies of all sizes to achieve massive cost savings while meeting their mission-critical needs.

"We chose the most cost-effective platform for Real Application Clusters: Intel/Linux," says Mr. Misson. "This environment has lower support costs than Unix, which requires a more expensive skill set."

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Backing the HP platform is assistance from HP Parallel Database Cluster specialists as well as the services of the HP and Oracle Cooperative Support Agreement, which provides seamless joint support in response to a single call to either partner.

bluecycle.com sought economy not just in its upfront purchase but also throughout the most expensive part of an IT investment—the ongoing cost of ownership. These dual goals led the company to HP.

“We chose the first and only entirely integrated Linux-based platform for Real Application Clusters, which was from HP,” says Mr. Misson. “And HP provides the level of support that we need along with the best tools on the market to manage the entire environment.

“No other server provider offers such tools as Insight Manager and its integrated lights-out controller for remote startup and management,” Mr. Misson continues. “These capabilities simplify management, enabling us to lower our operating costs.”

“HP support made the whole thing work”

bluecycle.com finds that an HP solution delivers the best return on its Oracle investment.

HP is Oracle’s largest platform provider and engineering partner. Real Application Clusters builds in unique clustering technology from HP that makes multiple servers function as one, enhancing reliability, scalability and management ease.

The two companies jointly engineer, configure, tune and test their products to provide the advantages of out-of-box integration: faster deployment and less risk.

“We regard the Oracle-HP Alliance as an asset,” says Mr. Misson, “providing us with the advantages of a fully integrated solution as well as a high level of joint support both before and after we purchased our solution.”

This support included solution testing by both HP and Oracle engineers at the HP Proof of Concept Centre in Birmingham, England; and the services of an HP solution architect, whose advice helped the bluecycle.com team to smoothly transfer from their Sun platform over a three-month period.

“HP support was superb,” says Mr. Misson. “Our HP solution architect helped us to quickly learn new skills and provided us with high-quality documentation. Our direct access to HP gave us the comfort of having a large company put its weight behind us. HP support made the whole thing work.”

Increasing opportunities, not costs

By purchasing the Intel-powered HP Parallel Database Cluster instead of the Sun configuration, bluecycle.com achieved upfront savings of \$130,000. The company anticipates continued paybacks throughout the lifecycle of the solution.

With the clustered ProLiant configuration, bluecycle.com can add processing power when it is needed instead of buying excess capacity at the outset. With the Parallel Database Cluster and Real Application Clusters, no system resources are wasted: bluecycle.com can increase capacity by simply adding another cost-effective ProLiant server to the cluster.

“And we have the flexibility to dedicate nodes to new lines of business or reallocate processors to handle peak loads – all on the same easy-to-manage platform,” says Mr. Misson.

“We can configure one node to run OLTP (online transaction processing) activities such as the auction, and allocate another to run OLAP (online analytical processing),” continues Mr. Misson. “And with all our data in real-time, from transactions to reports, we’ll be able to make more informed decisions sooner as we manage workflows.”

Inventing with industry leaders

bluecycle.com finds that a solution from HP, Oracle and Intel pays off in long-term competitiveness as well as economy. As these industry leaders continue to deliver unprecedented value and performance with open-standard architectures, their advances will keep bluecycle.com in the vanguard of its technology-driven business.

“HP is at the forefront of the industry with its clustering and management innovations,” says Mr. Misson, “as well as its partnerships with best-of-breed companies such as Oracle and Intel. As these partners take their next steps in joint development, HP will remain ahead, building on its proven expertise and technology leadership.

“And, unlike commodity hardware vendors,” concludes Mr. Misson, “HP excels at building business relationships with its customers. We make the most of all these IT assets. That’s our business.”

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