

# VERA takes extranet into the cloud

## Replacing hosted servers with cloud service lets staff focus on added value projects

*Since May 2000, VERA, a public body owned by the provincial Flemish Brabant government, has been providing a host of IT support services, including networks, communications and consultancy, to 62 communal public authorities. "We also bundle together the needs of the small scale local authorities and then negotiate for global rates and contracts," explains General Manager Freddy Deprez. To continue to meet client needs, VERA must stay up-to-date with IT technology and the market. Last year, VERA made the decision to do away with its server infrastructure, and move into the cloud – and to offer its clients the opportunity to do so too. The result? More time to spend providing the services those clients really need.*



*Freddy Deprez, General Manager of VERA, first presented this case at the BELTUG X-change on The Impact of Cloud Computing and Virtualisation Strategies on the WAN, 5 April 2011*

## CHALLENGES

### **Even the smallest organisations can benefit from a professional network**

After 10 years of using a hosting service for its server infrastructure, in 2010, VERA was renewing its IT management contracts. As the existing servers needed to be replaced, a decision had to be made. General Manager Freddy Deprez, the VERA staff and representatives of its clients agreed that the time had come to get rid of the physical servers, and move into the 'cloud'. "Cloud lets smaller organisations benefit from a truly professional network, and from the outsourcing of IT infrastructure and management," comment Deprez. "We and our clients have limited staff; they shouldn't be spending their time monitoring servers. So together, we decided to go virtual."

As a public body, VERA was required to publish a call for tender, according to the European procedure. "We are seen by our clients as being a trusted third-party between them and the supplier. And of course privacy of data and neutrality are important. Plus, we needed to ensure that the supplier is a strong, going concern, so that we don't lose access to our data if it goes out of business."

This case-study has been discussed at the BELTUG X-change of 05.04.2011

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VERA is a public body owned by the regional Flemish Brabant government, with 14 staff members who provide IT support for 62 out of the 65 local public authorities. It was founded in 2000 to support the local authorities in introducing modern e-government, first by building a modern, safe and reliable computer network and then through offering services on that network.

Acting as a third-party coordinating and supporting collaborative IT, it provide its clients with integrated business networks, hosted communications groupware and hosted IP telephony. Consultancy services include ad hoc IT projects, hands-on IT support and collaboration with local authorities on their initiatives.

## SOLUTIONS

### Cloud lets staff focus on adding value

“We developed a very comprehensive set of tender and contract criteria, including both more general and more specific conditions,” says Deprez. “That makes the big picture clear to everyone. In total, it took us four months to come to the best solution.”

There were several suppliers that met the bill, says Deprez, but ultimately VERA went with COLT. “Using the cloud has saved us about 10-15% of our previous costs, but the Total Cost of Ownership also includes staff costs. Now we can concentrate our staff’s efforts on collaboration with the local authorities, adding the value that they need”.

And not only are VERA’s own servers now virtual, but VERA’s clients can also make use of the contract. “We won’t impose COLT on anyone, but the contract is already there. So if they are moving offices or need to replace servers, they can consider cloud as an option – and a third-party option at that!”

## LESSONS LEARNT

### Find a reliable partner

Although some people are concerned about privacy and ownership of data in the cloud, Deprez does not consider this a major drawback. “Of course privacy and security are important. But having physical servers does not guarantee you security, either. To me, confiding our data to a reliable company like COLT is good management.”

Deprez is very positive about the market and future of cloud computing. “There are quite a few very good international players offering cloud services, and the services offered keep evolving and increasing. These days, only really big companies are going to see a profit in keeping and consistently upgrading their own server infrastructure. For the rest of us, cloud offers a much bigger advantage, by reducing the time required for server monitoring and management. That’s not our main function, so why should we do it?”

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