

CASE STUDY

TRAVEL BOOKING WEBSITE CHOOSES RED HAT ENTERPRISE LINUX OVER MICROSOFT

Wotif.com, founded in 2000, (www.wotif.com) is Australia's leading last-minute accommodations website and the global specialist in its field. Its easy-to-use booking engine offers travellers accommodation within the next 14 days at competitive rates. Wotif.com's portfolio includes over 6,000 hotels, motels, serviced apartments, resorts, guesthouses, and bed & breakfasts worldwide.

Wotif.com is headquartered in Brisbane, Australia, with offices in Canada, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom. Properties listed with Wotif.com can be booked online or through the Customer Service Center, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Online travel booking sites have exploded over the past few years. Wotif.com's website processes nearly 2 million user sessions per month, growing at more than 100% per annum. The site has more than 370,000 subscribers and makes more than 100,000 bookings monthly.

EXPLOSIVE GROWTH DEMANDS BETTER TECHNOLOGY

When Paul Young, Chief Information Officer for Wotif.com, joined the company in 2002 it was essentially a Microsoft shop. Wotif.com was having enormous issues with performance, scalability, and system availability because of 80-100% yearly growth.

"Basically, the existing infrastructure just could not cope with the increasing demand being placed upon it," explained Young.

Young's job was to determine which solution would be able to address these critical issues over the next five to seven years.

SEARCHING FOR VENDOR SUPPORT

Young was very familiar with UNIX®, Linux®, and open source technologies, having used them for a

long time as a programmer and later as a professional manager.

Young decided that Wotif.com's overall architecture needed a solution that was scalable, open source, and UNIX-like. Buy-in and support from tier-one vendors like Oracle was also essential. The platform that best met these needs was Red Hat® Enterprise Linux.

FAST FACTS

Industry: Travel

Geography: Australia

Challenge: Microsoft-based infrastructure could not scale to match Wotif.com's 100% growth rate.

Solution:

Platform: Red Hat Enterprise Linux AS

Software: Oracle 10g Standard Edition, Java 1.5

Hardware: AMD Opteron

Systems Management: Red Hat Network

Benefits:

- Increased performance upto 500% peak load.
- Lower TCO.
- Simplified systems administration.

“I find it astounding that anyone could say that TCO for Microsoft servers is less than Linux-based servers! I have seventeen years experience in this industry and I’ve never seen this to be the case.”

“When we were first researching solutions a few years ago, Red Hat stood out because of its partnerships with major vendors like Oracle and IBM. There is not much difference in terms of the operating system with the Linux variants on the market, but even now, I still believe that Red Hat leads the way with industry partnerships. It’s this vendor support that makes Red Hat a comfortable proposition to take to senior management,” said Young.

THE SOLUTION = RED HAT + ORACLE 10g + AMD OPTERON

Wotif.com is using Red Hat Enterprise Linux AS on 64-bit AMD Opteron servers. The overall solution also includes Oracle Database 10g Standard Edition and Java® 1.5. Development is done using agile programming for rapid production of an application server with Java and J2EE™ on Fedora™ Core 3 machines.

Site architecture is based on open standards and utilizes high quality open source software where applicable. The Wotif.com site can handle all customer, supplier, and administrative requests, as well as integrated requests from third-party reservation systems.

Young appreciates the flexibility that Red Hat gives Wotif.com with its hardware choices. “I’m able to leverage off the best hardware and best processors available and find a Red Hat kernel that will run on it. In a business where hardware is changing rapidly, I don’t want to have to change all my operations, operating systems, processes, and procedures to get the best environment. With Red Hat I can port across to the hardware platform of my choice and off we go.”

LOWER COST, HIGHER PERFORMANCE

Wotif.com has found numerous benefits from its Red Hat Enterprise Linux migration, in areas such as performance, cost, and ease of administration. For example, when running any enterprise application there are a number of jobs that need to happen around the edges, like running reports, processing web logs, and backup tasks. Using the tools available with Red Hat Network these tasks can all be done seamlessly in the Red Hat environment, something that was much more difficult in a Microsoft infrastructure.

Wotif.com has also found its Red Hat environment to be much more cost effective. “I find it astounding that anyone could say that TCO for Microsoft servers is less than Linux-based servers! I have seventeen years experience in this industry and I’ve never seen this to be the case – it’s all marketing hype. I think that there is a new group of more savvy IT professionals coming through, and the marketing and their real-life experience just don’t match up,” said Young.

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The core benefit for Wotif.com has been in performance and availability. As a global operation running 24 hours a day, seven days a week, Wotif.com cannot tolerate downtime. They must guarantee customers the same experience, regardless of fluctuating usage or system load, and especially at peak load.

Under Wotif.com’s current architecture, extensive load testing has found that the site can run at 500% peak load. According to Young, there was no way that would have been possible with the previous infrastructure.

"For us, performance management has a huge focus. One of the primary issues facing online businesses is the fluctuating nature and periodic bursts of traffic. It's relatively simple to design a site that operates at speed for normal customer loads. However to handle peak periods when traffic can reach levels of 200-300% of normal loads a site requires a sophisticated and complex site architecture. Our continuing rapid growth compounds this issue. We've invested a lot in ensuring a consistent positive customer experience on our site under varying load conditions and it's essential that our IT infrastructure is able to back that up. At Wotif we want to ensure that our customers have an excellent experience every time they book accommodation with us," explained Young.

COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE

Wotif.com sees Red Hat as part of an overall approach to nimble and flexible operation within the IT market. The business is committed to open standards, non-proprietary open source software and operating systems, and open architectures.

"We're very satisfied with Red Hat and currently have no plans to change. While Red Hat continues to offer us an open architecture, transparency, strong relationships with tier one vendors, and a quick resolution on any issues, we will see them as a strategic partner in our business," concluded Young.

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