Schrack Seconet Designs a Stable, Flexible IT Infrastructure with VMware

Schrack Seconet AG is a high-tech international provider of fire alarm, communication and security systems. Customer trust is critical to business success in all three fields and is ultimately anchored in the reliability of the company's products and services. IT support inevitably plays an increasingly important role in this context. By migrating what was originally a decentralized IT infrastructure to VMware Cloud Foundation, Schrack Seconet has empowered a lean IT team to manage ongoing IT operations stably and flexibly.

Tailor-made security solutions throughout Austria and beyond

Schrack Seconet is an industry leader beyond the borders of Austria. Its product portfolio features fire detection systems, alarm and security systems as well as complete solutions for hospitals and care homes. Utter reliability and close partnership with customers are key success factors. The company complements its tailor-made product solutions with onsite and lifecycle management services. To enable Schrack Seconet to ramp up these services, it needed a more efficient IT set-up.

Schrack Seconet employs around 500 people worldwide and posted annual revenue of 134 million euros in 2020. A key ingredient in its recipe for success is close proximity to its customers enabled by numerous branch offices in Austria and partners abroad.

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Markus Volkmann, Manager Digital Strategy, IT Services and Organization, Schrack Seconet

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Headquartered in Austria, Schrack Seconet is a leading international high-tech provider of fire alarm, communication and security systems.

Industry
Manufacturing

Headquarters
Vienna, Austria

Partner
Bechtle GmbH has a presence across the whole of Austria, with some 250 staff at offices in Vienna, St. Pölten, Graz, Innsbruck and Götzis. Its large team of excellently accredited consultants serve a broad spectrum of companies and organizations, including high-end SMEs, enterprise customers and public authorities.

VMware footprint
VMware® vSphere®
VMware NSX® Data Center™
VMware vSAN™
VMware Cloud Foundation™

Top priority goes to failsafe performance

Security is central to everything that Schrack Seconet is and does. Absolutely failsafe performance commands are top priorities for a company keen to succeed in both the fire alarm and health care service markets. And digitalization is naturally playing an important role: IT already helps service technicians with their system maintenance work. For example, technicians conducting maintenance in the field have direct access to onsite data about the products fitted and the services provided to date. In the fire alarms segment, the company indeed goes further, storing fire alarm system data on a central platform and making it available to installation firms and partners. This allows the latter to provide services to end customers—a business line whose importance is growing all the time. Beyond that, IT supports product development. From feature requests received from customers, through testing to market readiness, every single step is documented in digital form, services the customers expect today.

To expand these services, Schrack Seconet clearly needed a more efficient IT set-up to keep its systems stable in the long term and in the face of growing demand. Previously, the company had to manage IT systems from both headquarters and branch offices. The 12-person IT team, headed by Markus Volkmann, manager of digital strategy, IT services and organization, were working with a structure that had taken shape organically over time. Due to the need for autonomous servers in the branch offices, this arrangement duplicated work and drove costs up unnecessarily. The solution was far from being ideal from the perspective of business development, so there was an urgent need to act. "The challenge for us was that we needed a number of IT specialists for this project," Volkmann says. "But it is hard to find the right people, especially when you only need them for a certain time to implement a project."

Leaner infrastructure for simpler IT management

To get around this problem, Volkmann and his team turned to Bechtle Austrian IT systems house, the partner of Schrack Seconet with whom they had already worked well for several years. Led by project manager Erwin Stephan, the specialists at Bechtle began by analyzing the status quo across the IT infrastructure before playing out a variety of optimization scenarios. Since Bechtle has had very positive experiences with VMware solutions in the past, it recommended a new structure based on VMware Cloud Foundation. While the individual branch offices still have their own hardware, this is now significantly leaner and is managed from Schrack Seconet headquarters. A hybrid approach to data storage was adopted. Depending on the level of sensitivity, data is stored either on the ERP system, in a company-owned data center or at a Bechtle data center.

After seeing the initial demonstrations, Volkmann and his team were quickly convinced that this was the optimum solution for them. "The new infrastructure gives us state-of-the-art technology that takes us as a company another major step forward," Volkmann explains.

"The new solution for Schrack Seconet is a lean end-to-end package that is centrally managed and easy to describe," Stephan says. Based on VMware Cloud Foundation, virtualization is realized by VMware vSphere; VMware NSX Data Center virtualizes the network architecture; and VMware vSAN models the company's storage needs. VMware SDDC Manager is used to handle central management.

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A stable and secure infrastructure eases the burden on IT

The new infrastructure has improved life for Volkmann and his team, in many ways. "To start with, it is a lot less work managing a system that is lean, cleanly structured and stable. In addition, we all notice the huge time savings," Volkmann says. In the past, the team would often have to set aside whole weekends to upgrade the hardware.

Further projects with VMware in planning

Schrack Seconet discovered yet another advantage on a completely different level. "Many of our customers themselves work with VMware environments. And now that we have even more relevant knowledge in house, the support we provide to them has become better than ever," says Volkmann. That is a consideration the customers deeply appreciate, one that has deepened their trust in the company and improved customer loyalty. Having laid this firm foundation, the company is perfectly equipped for the challenges that lie ahead. Further projects are in the pipeline in the coming years to secure and add more jobs in the long term.

Today, this kind of project is completed in a few hours during live system operation. Similarly, versioning conflicts that once had to be painstakingly resolved are now cleared up automatically and in a fraction of the time.

Another benefit is that even IT all-rounders are perfectly capable of looking after the lean solution. "At a time when specialists are in short supply, it is very useful not to have to recruit experts for each individual area when we don't need them all year round," Volkmann explains.

At the same time, the new structure has tightened up discipline surrounding the integration of new IT services and solutions. "We now have very clear rules about how certain things have to be resolved," Volkmann says. "So, we won't end up with a cluttered and unmanageable structure again as time goes on."

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