



Intel Gigabit Ethernet helps Rabobank perform desktop installations and boost access to business-critical information on its servers.

By implementing Intel Gigabit Ethernet on the servers hosting its banking and financial services applications, Rabobank Utrecht has greatly reduced the time taken by users to access and download data essential to their daily work.

Case Highlights

Profiled Organisation	Rabobank Utrecht UA.
The Challenge	Rabobank required much faster throughput from its servers in order to improve the availability of data for counter and back-office staff in its 12 branches around Utrecht. The bank therefore needed to increase the speed of connectivity on the servers holding its vital applications and data.
The Solution	The answer was to implement Intel Gigabit Ethernet on its two main HP Compaq servers, thereby providing the much higher bandwidth and performance required to carry out desktop installations and to handle ever-increasing amounts of data and applications.
Benefits	Intel Gigabit Ethernet solution has increased the availability of vital data, improving staff productivity and enabling the IT team to perform desktop installations at any time without impacting user access to business-critical applications. The solution eliminates the long waiting times and time-outs previously encountered by users when accessing information held on the servers that host the bank's main applications. It brings immediate staff productivity gains, because data can now be accessed and downloaded to the desktop much faster than before. The increased performance of Rabobank's network infrastructure will therefore enable employees to be more productive generally and to offer customers even higher levels of service than before.

Summary

Rabobank's roots lie in agriculture. What began as a collection of small rural banks towards the end of the nineteenth century is today a major international banking and financial services group. It is owned by some 328 local banks, which provide services and products to the Dutch retail and business markets. Together with Rabobank Nederland, these banks and other subsidiary companies form Rabobank Group, making it a truly one-stop financial services provider offering everything from insurance and pensions to asset management, leasing and mortgage finance.

In its Dutch home market, Rabobank Group has 1.3 million members, nine million business and private customers, and is market leader in virtually every area of financial services. Outside the Netherlands, the Group has 222 offices and employs a total of 6,532 people in 34 countries.

As IT Manager of Rabobank's Utrecht operation, Edwin Faber is responsible for ensuring that the bank's central branch and 11 district branches around the city provide its 450 counter staff and back-office administrators with a stable and efficient network infrastructure on a 24x7 basis. In 2002, Faber became concerned that the speed of access to business-critical banking and financial services applications held on the bank's two principal servers was unacceptably slow. Intel Gigabit Ethernet appeared to offer the immediate answer to his organisation's long-term requirements for higher performance and availability of data.

Challenge: The need for faster throughput for installations and data availability

Nowhere are high-speed, dependable network communications more important to business than in the competitive world of banking and finance, where today's customers expect fast, efficient service—whether it's at the branch counter, over the telephone or online, over the Internet. With so much dependence on technology, Rabobank Utrecht's IT team has a major responsibility to ensure that the bank's employees have fast, reliable network performance at their disposal, at all times.

The bank's network runs mainly on Category 5 copper wiring, with some fibre optic links in the backbone network between its central switches and 14 servers, many of which are used for development. Edwin Faber says he had previously invested in a Cisco Catalyst switch*, which is equipped with both copper and fibre interface ports, giving him a choice of connectivity to the servers.

Rabobank Utrecht's two main servers—an HP Compaq ML 530* and an ML 370*—share the hosting of the bank's lifeblood: key applications, Sybase* and SQL* databases, and major banking and financial services applications—many of them web-based—as well as applications supplied by insurance and pensions partner companies, and others developed by the central Rabobank organisation. Last, but not least, these two servers play an essential role in transmitting the necessary installation software to desktop machines whenever they are upgraded or replaced.

Process: Implementing a solution ahead of the problem

“We were concerned that these two servers had become so central to the daily running of the business, and knew we had to find a way to improve their data transfer rate and throughput dramatically,” says Edwin Faber. “The installation of new workstations, for example, involves large file transfers from server to desktop and, because the data transfer speed was so slow, this often led to bottlenecks in the network.

“As a result, our users were experiencing long waits to access their applications whenever we performed an installation. Performance was also poor at busy times of day, when hundreds of employees were using the system simultaneously to access and download multiple applications, both from the local servers and those on the bank's central system. Overnight backups were also a concern because we were never sure if they would be completed ahead of the next day's business,” he adds.

Edwin Faber says the last thing he needed was for the network itself to become a bottleneck, so the only answer was to increase the bandwidth and throughput from the servers. In 2002, therefore, he and his team installed Intel Gigabit Ethernet Server Adapters cards in the company's two main servers—one with an interface to the CAT 5 UTP copper wiring, the other via a fibre connection.

Solution: Preventing bottlenecks and improving productivity

Intel® Gigabit Ethernet not only allows Rabobank Utrecht to prevent potential bottlenecks, but also eliminates the long delays previously experienced by branch staff and back-office administrators when running queries and accessing large databases, which contain customer account details. In this way, the introduction of Intel Gigabit Ethernet has greatly increased staff productivity and enabled the company's employees to offer customers an even better service than in the past, thanks to the time saved.

“At the same time, my team no longer have to worry about that hassle of performing desktop installations during business hours,” says Edwin Faber. “The additional throughput also enables us to carry out overnight backups with greater assurance of completing the task before the following morning. More importantly, there are no more long waits for customers visiting the branches or phoning in because bank staff now have immediate access to customer account details on screen,” he adds.

Future: Plans to extend Gigabit Ethernet to other servers and the desktop

In view of the benefits achieved by implementing Intel Gigabit Ethernet on its two central servers, Edwin Faber says that, in time, the bank plans to implement the solution on other servers. He says that the bank will also upgrade its 450 HP Compaq PCs and laptops from 10/100Mbps to Gigabit connections as new models with the appropriate on-board interface cards are introduced.

“I have no doubt that we will eventually upgrade the rest of our servers and indeed the entire network to Gigabit speed”, says Edwin Faber. “For the time being, I believe that by upgrading our two most important servers to Intel® Gigabit Ethernet performance, we have made a big step towards our longer-term goal of future-proofing the network infrastructure”.

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