



Intel® Gigabit Ethernet enables OZ zorgverzekeringen to boost server-to-server performance and increase the availability of its data-intensive applications.

By implementing Intel® Gigabit Ethernet links between its 80-strong server population, OZ zorgverzekeringen (OZ) overcame the limitations of its existing 100 Mbps data transfer rate.

Case Highlights

Profiled Organisation	OZ zorgverzekeringen
The Challenge	Confronted by the need to manage and store an ever-increasing volume of data, OZ realised it had to significantly increase the speed of connectivity between the many servers that were running business-critical applications in its two separate data centres.
The Solution	Make use of the in-built Intel® Gigabit Ethernet PRO/1000 Server Adapter cards in the company's Dell® PowerEdge servers to accelerate the data transfer rate between the servers and thereby overcome the limitations of 100Mbps connectivity.
Benefits	The Intel Gigabit Ethernet solution has increased the availability of vital business data, thereby improving staff productivity and enabling the company to introduce many more feature-rich applications, which will allow it to continue providing a first-class service to policy holders and healthcare providers. The increased performance of the overall network infrastructure brought about by introducing Intel Gigabit Ethernet is expected to enable OZ's existing employees to handle a greater volume of business.

Summary

OZ is one of the largest regional health insurance companies in the Netherlands, offering hundreds of thousands of customers health insurance policies that deliver peace of mind. A non-profit organisation, employing about 600 people, it serves some 565,000 public and 35,000 private insurees from its head office in Breda and 11 regional offices throughout the country's southwest. OZ has an annual turnover of approximately \$1.6 billion.

The company held many business-critical applications on over 80 servers in two data centres. At 100 Mbps, the existing data transfer rate between the servers had become insufficient to sustain an acceptable level of performance. Employees were regularly complaining about having to wait for long periods to access information. The IT team were keen to store much more of the company's paperwork on imaging databases, but were limited by available processing speeds on the servers. In addition, backups were proving difficult to achieve within the desired timeframes. In short, the overall performance of the IT infrastructure was beginning to suffer, limiting the organisation's ability to introduce new business-enhancing systems and applications.

The answer was to increase the speed of connectivity between the servers using Intel Gigabit Ethernet links, thereby increasing the availability of applications and boosting staff productivity.

Challenge: Data transfer too slow to handle increasing volumes of data

Dutch health insurer OZ operates two computer centres located close to one another in Breda, each of which house a range of production servers. These constantly feed a range of healthcare applications to the 600 agents and administrative staff, who produce policies and investigate and settle claims. In addition to dealing with thousands of enquiries each day via telephone, email and fax, their job is to process and scan the mountain of paperwork that arrives daily in the building, such as declarations by policy holders and invoices from healthcare providers. An equally large volume of documentation needs to be sent out each night to clients and the organisations that provide their healthcare.

Faced with the need to manage and store this ever-increasing volume of data, OZ was growing concerned that the 100Mbps data exchange rate between its many production servers was now much too slow. Electronic Data Processing Manager, Peter Tas, says that, as a result, his team was often struggling to backup data within the allotted timeframes, with backups sometimes exceeding the overnight window and running into the next day.

“Many of our applications, such as IBM’s* Content Manager and SAS Information Delivery Portal, are highly data-intensive,” he says. “Added to this, we use resource-hungry imaging systems linked to DB2 and SQL databases for scanning and storing all incoming documents, as well as our employees’ daily output. At the end of the day, what our end-users see on their screens is a combination of all our systems and applications, which means we need to make them equally available to everyone at all times.”

Process: Speeding links between the server population

Peter Tas and his team began investigating possible solutions to the problem. They initially considered using fibre channel technology, but concluded it was not yet sufficiently mature to satisfy their immediate requirements. In 2002, they therefore made the decision to link the company’s Dell* PowerEdge server population of more than 80 machines with high speed connections. They began by connecting the two computer centres and installing links between all the servers using Intel® Gigabit Ethernet PRO/1000 Server Adapters.

“Being established users of Dell technology, we were fortunate that our servers came ready equipped with an in-built Intel Gigabit Ethernet capability,” explains Peter Tas. “This was good news for us because the Intel interface has an excellent reputation in the Gigabit Ethernet arena.”

“The solution has greatly improved the availability and performance of all our applications, and in particular those involving large amounts of data, such as imaging and content management. Gigabit Ethernet performance is critical to our business because, without very fast communications between servers, we cannot create the new and richer applications that enable our employees to continue providing the first-class service for which we are renowned,” he adds.

Solution: The scope to implement new applications

Peter Tas says that the Intel solution has enabled OZ to scan and store much greater volumes of paperwork on its imaging databases. This means that end-users are able to access the data they require much faster. He adds that, because they no longer have to wait for long periods to access applications, and because information is much easier to find than before, employees tend to make fewer errors when processing customer data. Peter Tas also believes that the introduction of Intel Gigabit Ethernet has given his IT team the necessary scope to implement new applications which will give call centre agents, home-based workers and administrative staff alike an even bigger picture when dealing with customers and suppliers.

Future: The ability to handle more business with the same number of staff

“Because response times are significantly and reliably faster than before, we have received a great deal of positive feedback from our end-users. We expect that the increased productivity that has come about through introducing Intel Gigabit Ethernet performance will enable the company to use the existing number of employees to handle an increased amount of business in the future,” concludes Peter Tas, adding that his organisation will certainly be a candidate for 10-Gigabit Ethernet performance when this becomes more readily available in the months ahead.

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