



Manufacturer Boosts Database Performance, Cuts Storage Costs, and Supports Growth

Customer: Ballance Agri-Nutrients
Website: www.ballance.co.nz
Customer Size: 700 employees
Country or Region: New Zealand
Industry: Manufacturing

Customer Profile

Launched in 2001, Ballance Agri-Nutrients manufactures agricultural fertilizers used by farmers across New Zealand.

Solution Spotlight

- Improves performance of BI system and online portal, giving customers a better experience.
- Improves performance of virtualized SAP infrastructure.
- Helps save on storage costs.

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Oliver Brinkmann, Information Systems Manager, Ballance Agri-Nutrients

Ballance Agri-Nutrients is the leading fertilizer manufacturer in New Zealand. The company wanted to improve the performance of its critical SAP applications to better serve customers. To do that, Ballance migrated its database to Microsoft SQL Server 2012, greatly improving application performance. Employees are more productive, and the company has cut storage costs by 60 percent. Also, Ballance can better handle business growth.

Business Needs

Ballance Agri-Nutrients is New Zealand’s leading manufacturer of fertilizers for use in farming operations. Headquartered in Tauranga, the company is a farmer-owned cooperative with more than 18,000 shareholders throughout the country.

Ballance has one of the country’s largest SAP software implementations, including SAP applications for business intelligence (BI), supply chain management, finance, and process integration. These modules had been running on Microsoft SQL Server 2005 software, which the company was happy with. However, end-of-life hardware and a need to embrace new technology meant that Ballance was interested in

upgrading to the newest version of Microsoft SQL Server.

“Keeping ahead of the game is very important to us, in terms of technology,” says Oliver Brinkmann, Information Systems Manager at Ballance Agri-Nutrients. “We have ambitious strategic plans, and we need innovative technology that gives us the scalability to support that growth.”

Ballance especially wanted to offer strong support for its SAP-based online portal, which farmers use to place orders and communicate directly with the company. “Our business is all about the customer experience, making sure that our





customers can access the information they need whenever they want to," says Brinkmann. "The database software underlying the portal needs to be high-performing and reliable, and we're always looking to improve it. This is becoming increasingly important, because more of our business is being conducted online."

The organization was also interested in improving the performance of its SAP BI application, which the company's office-based employees use to analyze data. "Getting reports to analysts faster was one of our goals," says Brinkmann.

Solution

In September 2012, Ballance chose to upgrade its database environment to Microsoft SQL Server 2012 Enterprise. "We had already decided to stick with SQL Server, and the new version had all the features we needed," says Tyrone Mapp, SAP Basis Team Lead at Ballance Agri-Nutrients.

Specifically, the company was interested in the backup and data compression capabilities in SQL Server 2012, which can reduce data and backup space and boost performance by storing more data per gigabyte of space. Ballance engaged New Zealand-based Microsoft partner SQL Services Ltd to help with the design, build, and configuration of the new environment. SQL Services Ltd worked closely with Ballance to ensure the solution was built to the highest standard and that any issues were resolved during migration.

By December 2012, Ballance had migrated its entire SAP environment to SQL Server 2012 running on HP ProLiant BL460c G7 blade servers. The company's total data warehouse was compressed from 640 gigabytes to 200 gigabytes of data. SQL Server 2012 also supports the firm's newly virtualized SAP infrastructure. By using both SQL Server 2012 and virtualization, the company now uses 10 physical servers

instead of the dozens it would have had to use without virtualization.

Hundreds of Ballance employees, including sales and marketing staff members and IT employees, access the SAP applications supported by the new environment. Also, thousands of farm customers are using the company's online portal every day.

Benefits

With its new SQL Server 2012 solution, Ballance is seeing improved performance for its SAP applications, which speeds BI analysis and makes employees more productive. In addition, the company has trimmed storage costs by 60 percent, and it has the right technology to support growth.

Increases Performance and Speeds BI Analysis Process

By taking advantage of the database compression made possible by SQL Server 2012, Ballance was able to greatly boost overall database performance. "SQL Server 2012 data compression has significantly improved the performance of our SAP applications, including our online portal," says Brinkmann. "Our BI system runs much faster, so our analysts can create critical BI reports faster than before. The entire BI process is more efficient as a result."

Performance has also improved for the company's virtualized SAP infrastructure. "For example, with virtualization, our database servers went from 16 CPU cores and 128 gigabytes of memory each down to 6 CPU cores and 48 gigabytes of memory," says Mapp. "But even with that drop in memory resources available to the application and database servers, we still saw improved performance."

Improves Customer Experience and Cuts Storage Costs by 60 Percent

Now that Ballance employees have a higher-performing system, they are more productive. "Because it takes less time to get reports, our BI users are happier overall, which means they're more productive," says Brinkmann. "And farmers accessing the online portal have a faster, better experience as well."

Ballance has also used SQL Server 2012 backup compression to reduce system backup times, which contributes to savings in storage costs. "By using the backup compression features in SQL Server 2012, we are saving at least 60 percent on storage costs, and close to that amount in backup space costs," says Brinkmann.

Gives Ballance a Better Ability to Handle Business Growth

With its smaller, higher-performing database, Ballance will easily be able to accommodate its ambitious growth plans. "Our business plan now and for the future is to be New Zealand's recognized expert in agri-nutrient advice, supply, and sustainable farm management," says Brinkmann. "SQL Server 2012 makes it easy for us to bring on new users without having to invest in new hardware. It future-proofs our business, and helps us save on storage costs. We are definitely able to be more scalable and more flexible than we were in the past."

Overall, SQL Server 2012 fits in with the company's vision of using the latest, best technology for its IT infrastructure. "SQL Server 2012 is innovative, and no other technology we've seen comes close," says Brinkmann. "It gives us a way to keep our business current while helping us grow. We couldn't be happier with this solution."

Software and Services

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Microsoft SQL Server 2012 Enterprise

Hardware

- HP ProLiant BL460C G7 blade servers

Partner

- SQL Services Ltd