

Boden supports sector-leading customer service with help from IBM and Qcubed

Overview

Customer challenge

As one of the fastest growing mail order clothes retailers in the UK, Boden's rapid expansion was putting pressure on its IT infrastructure. Achieving the required levels of resiliency was becoming expensive and there was little scope for expansion to meet new business opportunities and maintain high levels of customer service.

Solution

IBM Business Partner Qcubed helped Boden build, test and install a resilient, flexible and scalable IBM infrastructure that is already driving efficiency and customer service benefits and will continue to meet Boden's needs into the future.

Customer benefits

- Improved customer experience
- Ultra-high system availability
- Flexibility and scalability to accommodate future opportunities
- Cost-effective
- Remote management of geographically distant systems.



Founded in the UK in 1991 by former investment banker Johnnie Boden, J.P. Boden & Co. Ltd sells high quality clothing from mail-order catalogues, the web and two stores. The company's emphasis on customer service, attention to detail and a friendly style has led to exceptional growth as its range of products expands.

Boden launched in the US in 2002, followed by Germany in 2007. Now employing over 700 people, the company despatches around 10,000 orders daily and is one of the fastest growing mail order companies in the UK with annual sales of around £100million and worldwide sales of £160million.

Predictably, Boden's success has put pressure on the organisation's IT systems. Matthew Dalton, Head of IT at J.P. Boden & Co. Ltd says: "We needed a strategic model to support the growth of our IT infrastructure over time.

Flexibility and scalability are important to ensure that our business makes the most of new opportunities as they arise. Our sector increasingly competes on customer service and it's an area where we've always taken a lead. We felt we needed to take a new direction with our IT infrastructure to keep us ahead."

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Built on



offerings

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Finding long-term solutions

Boden took a detailed look at the hardware infrastructures pitched at mid-market customers and decided to base its new systems on IBM blade technology. “Our choice of IBM was influenced by a number of factors,” explains Dalton. “We want hardware with a clear roadmap for the future to avoid having to revisit our IT infrastructure every four or five years. We want to deal with a company that cares about supplying a really good product and we want value for money. A fourth area where the IBM Express Advantage offerings excel is delivery times. IBM understands that the mid-market wants quick turnaround.”

Boden wanted to implement its new infrastructure in three phases. The first two were relatively small and involved installing the platform for a new warehouse management system and a new stock allocation system. The largest project was replacing the existing infrastructure supporting Boden’s web sites in the UK, US and Germany. Qcubed, an IBM Business Partner, won the contract to help Boden design, specify and implement the first phase and, providing that went well, would complete phase two. Boden intended to run the tender process again for provision of the web infrastructure. In reality this third phase was also awarded to Qcubed without a re-tender. “We’d built a good working relationship with Qcubed. Its people are focussed on meeting our requirements and we now view them as a long-term partner for Boden,” confirms Dalton.

Building trust

Boden had challenging timelines. The warehouse management infrastructure was to be delivered in six weeks, the stock allocation infrastructure in three months and the web site infrastructure in four months. Dalton says: “By the time we’d agreed the final specifications, we were really up against the timescales. Qcubed pulled out all the stops and achieved every deadline. I know I can trust them to deliver.”

The IBM Express Advantage solution now in place at Boden consists of two IBM Bladecenters with 17 blade servers, three powerful IBM System x™ 3850 M2 servers, which are used for a Microsoft™ SQL server cluster, and two IBM DS4700-based Storage Area Networks.

IBM technology, the IBM Linux™ operating system (installed on the five blade servers used by Boden’s warehouse management system) and the clustered server environment were all new to Boden. Glenn Robinson, Technical Director at Qcubed says: “We made sure that Boden’s Infrastructure Manager and infrastructure specialists helped us with the installation so that they understood what new equipment they had, how to manage it and how to control it remotely. We also ran workshops for the infrastructure team, the database team and the software developers to bring them up to speed on the new systems.”

Delivering business efficiency

The stock allocation system has presented plenty of new business opportunities for Boden. For the first time, the company can manage its stock position worldwide, driving product availability from the warehouse closest to a customer’s location.

In the long run Boden expects to improve its in-stock position considerably, speeding order delivery and improving customer service. In monetary terms this could be worth millions of pounds to the business.

The warehouse management system is installed and functioning very successfully in Boden's new warehouse in the US and will be rolled out in the UK in about six months time. Dalton says: "The fact that we can run our 80,000 sq ft warehouse in Pennsylvania remotely avoids having to send part of my IT team out to the US every time we have a support issue or something needs to change."

Resilient, scalable platform

Availability and reliability are important benefits provided by all three of Bodens new systems. "We're operating 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year," explains Dalton. "And when the bulk of your sales depend on web sites, ultra-high system availability is crucial."

Previously, Boden kept outages to a minimum by installing high levels of expensive redundancy through additional hardware. The new infrastructure provides resiliency in a more efficient and cost-effective way. The web infrastructure, for example, uses clustered servers that enable failover from one machine to another without any impact. This has also improved the flexibility and scalability of the system. If a seasonal sale creates a large increase in visits to the UK web site, for example, the German and US site can be moved to another server temporarily.

Dalton says: "We're getting increasingly creative with our web site – it's becoming more important as a way to differentiate ourselves and make our brand work harder for us. Not only is our new infrastructure really solid, it can expand and flex to accommodate our needs. Who knows what we'll want to do on the web in two years' time?"

Making IT invisible

Moving forwards, Boden is standardising its IT infrastructure by replacing its existing systems with IBM solutions. "I'm keen to drive efficiency into our entire infrastructure and achieve more with less," explains Dalton. "Currently Qcubed is helping us with a server consolidation project that will increase the resiliency of our older systems, reduce our hardware maintenance costs and cut our power bills."

"Our business objective is to offer outstanding service. We do that by working as a team to help the business design and sell great clothes. I want IT to be invisible in that process – if it's effective and efficient it unobtrusively supports a better experience for our customers," concludes Dalton.

For more information

Please contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner. Visit us at: ibm.com/expressadvantage/uk

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