

SMET-BORING



ESSENTIALS

Industry

Underground technology and environmental applications

Location

Dessel, Belgium

Technology

- EMC VNXe integrated storage system
- EMC Unisphere for storage management

Advantages

- Investment-friendly, tailored for an SME
- Optimum availability and accessibility
- Greater reliability and stability
- More efficient and user-friendly management
- Straightforward implementation and minimum workload
- Compact and space-saving
- Automatic deduplication and compression
- Smooth scalability
- Future-focused platform

OVERVIEW

Over a century or more of carrying out drilling, draining and underground works, the Smet-Boring group has gathered data about the various layers and substrata of the ground that lies below just about every square kilometre in Belgium. All of this business-critical knowledge and invaluable surveying information is stored centrally and securely and is available 24/7 for the company's 150 users working at dozens of sites in Belgium and abroad. Thanks to its robust, stable and scalable EMC storage solution, Smet-Boring's operating nerve centre is in a position to accommodate exponential growth in data volumes, as well as adapt to any new developments in technology that the future may bring.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

With its existing HP storage solution literally bulging at the seams, the time had come for the Smet-Boring group either to make a significant investment in an upgrade to the existing system, or take a firm decision to opt for a forward-looking, virtualised IT platform that offered a high level of storage. With this in mind and to put an end to the limited performance and capacity of its existing storage solution and at the same time accommodate the exponential growth in data and increasing demand from clients for faster surveying results, Smet-Boring replaced its dated storage with a versatile, cost-effective system from EMC, integrated on the virtualised VMware server. Today, the central server room is running redundant EMC VNXe storage that can be accessed from anywhere and at any time by the system's 150 users, either via the Belgacom Explore Network that links the three sites, or via the Internet, using a landline or mobile connection. Storage management is now easy to use and virtually automatic, operating centrally through the EMC Unisphere management platform, which means that the group's two-person IT team has almost nothing to worry about.

MORE THAN 100 YEARS OF UNDERGROUND TECHNIQUES AND TECHNOLOGY

Belgium's Princess Elisabeth Station at the South Pole, the Diabolo tunnel in Zaventem and Central Station in both Antwerp and Amsterdam are just a few examples of the projects successfully completed by the Smet-Boring group's three subsidiaries (Smet Grond-Water-Technieken; Smet Tunnelling and Smet Funderings- en Consolidatietechnieken). With a staff of 450, this family-run company has been specialising in underground technology since 1900. More recently, Smet-Boring has been involved in environmental applications, leading the way in a wide range of market segments, such as drainage (water discharge), vertical drilling, water treatment, geothermal energy, micro-tunnelling, tunnel-boring works using tubing, sewer refurbishment and a whole assortment of foundation and consolidation techniques.

In Belgium, the group is a leader in its market because the multidisciplinary integration of its various specialist skills enables Smet-Boring to take on projects that its competitors would rather not tackle. Smet-Boring is not just a well-known name in the industry, but also the preferred partner of public and private clients alike.

More information about Smet-Boring at www.smetboring.be

SIMPLE, INFINITE EXPANSION

“About 90% of all our documentation, project drawings and surveying data has been digitised in recent years,” says IT Manager, Benny Aerts. “This data, including information dating from the beginning of the 20th century, is crucially important for our engineers and project managers. It provides an insight and valuable information about the substrata and soil conditions for virtually every square kilometre in Belgium. At the same time, the data collected by our machines during drilling, sinking piles, etc. is all stored and made available to our clients.”

Developments in technology mean that the volume of data at Smet-Boring is increasing exponentially, because more and more photographs and video recordings are being taken of the findings from projects such as drilling works or sewer refurbishments. “We now also centralise our storage and standardise our consultation processes, whereas previously each subsidiary organised its own database,” explains IT staffer, Ilse Claes. “The need for more capacity and greater performance kept growing visibly, which meant that the existing system was beginning to bulge at the seams.” Much to the displeasure of employees, too, who complained of slowness and a lack of flexibility. The IT team was also spending valuable time constantly adapting or adjusting the configuration to free up capacity. “Some people were even storing data themselves locally on their own laptop, which was not secure as cars are regularly broken into on site and computers stolen.”

After a thorough study of the market, both financially and from a technology point of view, Smet-Boring chose integrator 3-IT out of six potential providers. 3-IT proposed the EMC storage solution. “We replaced their old HP SANs with an EMC VNXe 3100, quadrupling the storage space available to 4.4 terabytes,” says 3-IT owner, Dominik Verrydt. “In actual fact, the capacity of the VNXe is extremely simple and infinitely expandable. By implementing a clever and cost-effective capacity strategy, using features such as integrated file deduplication, compression and thin provisioning – i.e. when you make the storage capacity available only when it is actually needed – we are able to keep the growth in data volume under control efficiently and also save on upfront storage costs.”

NO MORE TIME WASTED

Not only does high-performance storage and central management make life easier for the IT team, but also for the system’s users. “We’ve stopped wasting time,” laugh Benny Aerts and Ilse Claes. “So our main aim has been achieved. Backups are carried out automatically using customised scripts. To do the full weekly backup, all we have to do now is stick a tape in the drive. And with the Unisphere management platform, we can also view status and history at a glance.”

Users have stopped complaining, too. Quite the contrary, in fact. EMC VNXe enhances the reliability of the business applications, such as Oracle, Lotus Notes, VMware®, Visual Planning, Microsoft® SharePoint and BouwOffice (ERP). Users connect directly with the server via Citrix, meaning that the very latest input is available immediately. The user-friendly interface barely differs between laptop or PC. Performance and availability are also at optimum levels during upgrades to software and hardware. “And stability has increased as a result of the integrated redundancy.”

ATTRACTIVE PRICING TAILORED TO SUIT AN SME

Smet-Boring also called on the expertise of 3-IT for the implementation of EMC VNXe. “Two months was all it took, from the time the contract was awarded to testing and the operational switch in August 2011,” recalls Benny Aerts. “We had already been up and running for two weeks when our finance director asked me when the new storage would be installed. That says it all, doesn’t it?” The migration from old to new was carried out during the construction industry holidays, which is a quieter time for Smet-Boring. “I was on holiday myself. Thanks to the meticulous preparation with 3-IT, no one noticed a thing. There were no obstacles worth mentioning.” One important detail: it was possible to set up both systems in the same 20 m2 server room. “Which just goes to show how compact the VNXe is.”

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BENNY AERTS, IT MANAGER

Finally, Benny Aerts emphasises that the attractive pricing from both EMC and 3-IT was tailored to suit an SME such as Smet-Boring. “That was one of the determining arguments behind us opting for the VNXe,” he says. “That and the extended system support guarantee of five years instead of the usual three. For its part, 3-IT provides 24/7 remote and on-site support – plus it’s working with us to monitor future developments in the medium and long term in areas such as disaster recovery, cloud applications and data management.”

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