



Cloud services of NRB become top notch too

ENTERPRISE

NRB offers specialized services for systems integration, application development, hosting and operational management and IT consultancy. Their goal is to become number one in the Belgian market. NRB, a 100% Belgian company, has its headquarters and three datacenters in Herstal near Liège and subsidiaries in Ghent (CEVI), Namur (Adehis) and Malines (Logins). The NRB group employs over 950 people. With a revenue of 176 million Euros in 2010, it ranks among the top 5 of Belgian IT service providers.

BENEFITS

- more capacity due to virtualisation
- Modular architecture
- 10G ports
- Clustering of switches with vPC-technology

NRB of Herstal has ambitious plans. The company aims to become the biggest supplier of ICT services in Belgium and is not only working on expanding its infrastructure but also the geographical area of its customer portfolio in Brussels and Flanders. In addition, NRB continues to expand in the sectors in which it is traditionally active: banking, insurance, government and public utilities (gas, water, electricity). Meanwhile, the tapping of new areas, such as health care, is producing real results.

“Our customers have new requirements,” says Daniel Eycken, marketing manager of NRB. “They still want the high-quality services that they are used to getting from us. But on top of that, they are asking for even more flexibility in its supply and they want to pay us according to their usage. One way of meeting this demand is to provide more cloud services.”

To make this possible, NRB had to provide additional capacity and work with innovative technology. This was resolved by building a third data centre. NRB’s data centres now occupy a total area of more than 1500 m², so there is plenty of space for housing cloud solutions too.

Initially this involved the supply of infrastructure services, such as processing, storage and backup capacity, also known as ‘Infrastructure as a Service’. Recently, NRB also started offering the use of complete application platforms (‘Platform as a Service’). So for example, NRB is hosting the SAP application platform of Partezis. This allows Partezis, in turn, to offer its customers its SAP-based applications in the form of ‘Software as a Service’ services.

No compromises

NRB did not want to make any compromises on stability and reliability in its new data centre either. “Currently there are a number of highly critical applications running in our data centres, such as for Internet banking. These must always be available, which means we only want to work with the very best infrastructure. We must always guarantee our customers quality and security. That’s why we only choose reliable partners who are also financially stable. We definitely think twice before engaging with a company,” say Thierry Engels, who manages the quality of the ICT infrastructure at NRB.

“For our third data centre we needed an innovative partner who had already built up a good reputation in the field of network technology. The capacity and the quality of the technical support also had to be



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Thierry Engels, Head of Facility Management & Data Center Facility Management NRB

optimal. Our current supplier and market leader Cisco again turned out to be the right partner for this. Cisco’s good name, with us as well as in the entire Belgian market, proved once again to be a plus point.”

In 2000 NRB had already chosen MPLS networks from Cisco. And for IP telephony too, it went to the same supplier. NRB has been a Cisco customer for a long time and has various other systems from them. This makes it easier to integrate everything.



NRB did not carry out any comparative market studies when it chose the Nexus technology. "We always keep up to date with the products on the market. At the time, there was no other technology that was comparable with Cisco's Nexus," says Laurent Brouwers, who manages Storage & Network at NRB.

With Cisco's Nexus it is easy to expand your network without having to write off investments from the past. After all, the Nexus is a modular platform. This allows NRB to combine the Nexus 2000 with Nexus 5000 systems. "We can also install the Nexus 2000 and Nexus 5000 in separate locations. But they can still be managed as one entity. This is not possible with other switches," says Laurent Brouwers.

NRB was one of the first to bring the Nexus into production in our country. Cisco's Nexus turned out to be a lot cheaper than the Cisco Catalyst systems that NRB had installed in its other data centres. The Nexus also offers a number of clear benefits such as the possibility of bundling or *clustering* switches with the aid of Virtual PortChannels technology (vPC), so that STP is not activated and known stability problems associated with this protocol are avoided. Moreover, the Nexus offers a complete modular architecture, 10G ports and extensive integration with VMware.

"Our new data centre offers us a lot more capacity because we only work with virtualized servers. Right from the beginning, Nexus was designed to work in virtualized environments. After all, the virtualization and consolidation of servers has an impact on the bandwidth. Nexus can always match the higher performance of the network. Cisco's Nexus system also meets all our customers' requirements in the areas of security and efficiency. The cost per 10G port on a Nexus is also a lot lower than with other systems from Cisco," says Laurent Brouwers.

Fibre Channel over Ethernet

NRB invested in the future and in the Nexus from Cisco. Currently NRB has 14 Nexus 5000 systems and 15 Nexus 2000 systems. A few more will join these soon. In addition, the network traffic runs through Catalyst 6500 switches and Cisco 7600 routers. Cisco ASA 5500 systems and Cisco's Firewall Service Module are, among other things,

responsible for the security of the network. Load balancing takes place with Cisco's ACE modules for Catalyst 6500 and Cisco 7600.

The infrastructure of all the data centres is now ready to evolve according to the needs of NRB's customers. "We also wanted to invest in the trends for the next few years. One of these is the growing interest in Fibre Channel over Ethernet (FCoE). This technology allows SAN traffic to run over Ethernet networks. For us, this is probably the main advantage of the Cisco Nexus in the long term. Currently we are working with Cisco, EMC and VMware and a number of proof of concepts. The convergence of these two types of network traffic should eventually significantly reduce the costs of our data centre. The installation should be complete within a few months. The possibilities offered by FCoE will also probably make the maintenance a lot simpler for our staff in the future," says Thierry Engels.

The customers are also experiencing the benefits of the Nexus technology. For instance, the performance of NRB's applications has improved further and making backups is faster too.

"We are proud of our data centres and especially our cloud offering. Once again we are working with a high-performance infrastructure that saves on costs and allows us to offer our customers new and attractively priced services. Thanks to Cisco's technology, we now have a stronger position in the market for offering total solutions. This brings us closer to our goal of being number one in the field of ICT services in the Belgian market," concludes Thierry Engels.