

Customer Case

VAB develops its services on a proactively managed IT infrastructure

We tend to associate VAB with breakdown assistance and recovery. So it's clear that VAB employees need to be available at all times: nobody likes to be left waiting at the roadside. This means that the alarm centre constantly depends on an extremely reliable IT infrastructure. IT is also essential for VAB's other activities, such as their driving school and diagnostics centre.

VAB's customers include both individuals and companies, and they all expect impeccable service. This is why VAB called upon Cheops to manage their IT network, firewalls, storage and Wi-Fi. In doing so VAB opted for proactive management and constant monitoring. This means that VAB has no need to invest in such specialised knowledge itself and it is able to concentrate on its customer service, internal support and IT projects.



VAB also continues to evolve and innovate in the area of IT. The number of staff employed in its internal IT department has doubled over a five-year period to 35 employees. Based at the head office, they support around 800 users across the various sites, providing all kinds of different services to customers. It is essential to VAB to provide a seamless service because this could have a considerable financial impact on professional clients. Continuity is particularly crucial for the activities of the alarm centre. The alarm centre is available 24/7 and depends on the IT network to be able to use the call centre software. Equally important is the uninterrupted operation of the software used by dispatchers in guiding those giving road assistance. Moreover, now that VAB has also digitised the telephone system, this communication channel also relies on the IT network. In short, if the network goes down then staff at VAB are no longer able to help their customers. This is unthinkable for an organisation like VAB, where speed and a continuous service are of the essence, and that's also why investments have already been made in redundant IT facilities.

Combining internal and external expertise


"The IT scene is becoming increasingly complex and it is getting harder for our system managers to tackle or avoid all problems themselves", explains Dirk Schellinck, ICT manager at VAB. "At a certain point we therefore had to choose between acquiring additional in-house expertise or outsourcing certain areas to an external provider offering all the relevant expertise. We chose the latter and for us that was a first. Until then we had never worked with an external partner on a structural basis." VAB opted for a phased approach and began by outsourcing the management of its

infrastructure. PC user support remained in their own hands. In concrete terms, the automobile association was looking to contract a partner to manage their IT network, storage, firewalls and Wi-Fi. The network and firewalls are particularly crucial to VAB.

An approach custom-made to suit the requirements

Dirk Schellinck: "Although there are around 1200 people working for VAB we still have the mentality of a smaller business: reacting quickly, flexibility, and a personal and customer-friendly approach are typical of our company. These are also the areas where we wish to stand out in the market. We therefore required a partner who understood our approach and who was sufficiently flexible to adapt to our evolving needs. Indeed, our IT infrastructure changes regularly to suit the priorities of our business."

VAB contacted several potential partners but larger providers were unable to provide the flexibility we required. VAB found what it was looking for at Cheops: a flexible and collaborative IT partner used to working with medium-sized companies. The financial aspect was another asset. "Partially outsourcing our IT is certainly no more expensive than managing everything ourselves, and there are some extra advantages as well," declares Dirk Schellinck. The partnership between VAB and Cheops began with a number of introductory meetings. "Cheops started by analysing and creating a detailed picture of our infrastructure to familiarise themselves with the systems already in place and allow us to define the scope of the project. Just two or three weeks later, Cheops implemented a package of IT services or managed services. As IT partner, they assume full responsibility and offer ironclad guarantees for the optimal operation of those IT services.



"With these managed services our IT management has now gone from reactive to proactive."

Dirk Schellinck, ICT manager VAB

For example, new firewalls had been installed fairly recently, but Cheops immediately gave us the guarantee that they would invest in getting to know the technology we had chosen. Cheops has kept its word and meanwhile several of its staff have obtained the necessary certificates”, confirms Dirk Schellinck.

Less IT worries thanks to a proactive approach

As VAB had hoped, the transition to external IT management went very smoothly, even though the project was carried out during a short and intensive period. Cheops now remotely monitors the network and firewall and frequently carries out modifications or solves problems on-site. Everything is managed in accordance with the predetermined Service Level Agreement (SLA). “The introduction of managed services has enabled IT management to evolve from a reactive to a proactive approach”, says Dirk Schellinck. “Cheops takes action before we even notice anything is wrong so we have less acute problems than before. Previously the firewall would go down or there would be a delay in the network that we were unable to explain or solve. Such issues are now a thing of the past. In addition, we have a quarterly meeting with Cheops, where we are given an overview of what they have done over the previous period. They also make suggestions on how to improve the infrastructure and these, too, are aimed at avoiding future problems. Another advantage of the managed services approach is that we retain the knowledge of our IT environment and keep an overview at all times.”

“For us, working with an external IT partner like Cheops is certainly no more expensive than managing everything ourselves, and there are also additional benefits.”

Dirk Schellinck, ICT manager VAB

Flexible support

VAB appreciates their provider’s flexible attitude. “We had just installed a new digital switchboard when we started our service contract”, explains Dirk Schellinck. “This had a major impact on our network and in the following months this called for many unforeseen changes. Cheops took it in their stride and they were a tremendous help. Another example of a good experience is that servers are now also purchased through Cheops and since then they have been keeping an eye on the service contracts. They tell us when it’s time for maintenance so that all systems keep running smoothly and without any problems.”

More time to focus on quality and innovation

With the outsourcing of its IT management, VAB no longer needs to worry about the IT network. As a result, systems managers can now dedicate more time to supporting their end users. A senior systems manager can now monitor the service provided by Cheops and manage his/her own IT projects with added value, whereas in the past these were outsourced because there was no time. “With the same team we can now put more emphasis on internal customer satisfaction, quality and innovation”, says Dirk Schellinck.

Focus on core tasks thanks to managed services

“Opting for externally managed IT services was the right decision for VAB: our IT environment has clearly gained maturity so this is certainly not an end point”, confirms Dirk Schellinck. “From now on, we will evaluate on a yearly basis what else we can outsource. For instance, we have asked Cheops to manage five of our servers, again because we realise Cheops has the specific expertise and specialised tools to manage them proactively and avoid downtime. These servers include the specific application that operates our alarm switchboard, so we are talking about critical systems here. This project consists of different phases and after each positive evaluation we will be looking to outsource even more so we can concentrate on our core tasks.”

The Cheops solution

Advantages of the Cheops solution

- more flexibility, quality and efficiency
- quick problem-solving
- greater availability and performance
- proactive management
- access to a broad expertise
- no financial impact
- guaranteed back-up and security

About VAB

The Belgian automobile association VAB provides maximum protection for the mobility of its members. They are best known for their breakdown assistance, but they also offer lots of other services including travel assistance, bicycle assistance, a driving school, fleet services for companies, the sale of second-hand cars, the VAB fuel card and a diagnostics centre. VAB has its head office in Zwijndrecht and employs around 1,200 staff.

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