Brabo opts for the cloud for faster innovation

The pilotage and mooring company Brabo has switched from local IT infrastructure to IT in the Cheops Cloud. The management is fully outsourced to Cheops. This way, Brabo can now focus on the development of new and innovative applications that support the business. The ultimate goal: to steer more ships safely through the port and deploy pilots and boatmen more efficiently.

cheops

"The port used to be a rather traditional sector but now we have really taken the lead," says Koen De Groof, commercial manager at Brabo. "So we are increasingly focusing the IT on the business – we are developing our own very specific applications to make our services even better, faster, safer and more efficient."

Time is a crucial factor for Brabo: the company often needs to be able to respond very quickly to new demands. For the port, it is also important that every day as many ships as possible are safely moored and unmoored or safely piloted to their destination.

Switch to the cloud

The first step towards more automation, higher efficiency and better planning was Brabo's switch to the cloud. "Previously we had our own local server room, which gradually became filled with server infrastructure," says Johan Kenens, IT manager at Brabo. "But we couldn't carry on with this approach due to growth of our activities and our focus on digitisation and innovative projects. "

The IT environment was growing due to the continuous development of applications and the high level of automation. "However, our IT department did not grow at the same pace," says Johan Kenens. "Our IT infrastructure became so diverse and complex that we had to hire specialists more and more often to optimally manage the infrastructure. We could no longer deliver the quality needed without recruiting and training new people. Moreover, for faster development we needed flexibility in setting up new environments, so that we could innovate and respond to the demands of the business faster. So we had plenty of reasons to switch to an externally managed IT infrastructure in the cloud."

Direct line to IT support

Brabo assessed a number of possible cloud partners for the IT migration and related services. Cheops was selected. Koen De Groof: "We think it is particularly important that Cheops is very close to its customers and is thinking proactively with us: we always have a direct line to them for consultation and support. With Cheops, we can count on a personal approach where our priorities are taken care of. This would probably be less the case with a larger service provider. In addition, Cheops' service guarantees were also decisive in our decision-making process."

> " We think it is particularly important that Cheops is very close to its customers and is thinking proactively with us: we always have a direct line to them for consultation and support. "

Koen De Groof,
Commercial Manager at Brabo

Fast and flexible innovation

The expertise of Cheops now nicely complements Brabo's internal IT department. "Our own IT employees no longer have to work on routine tasks and they have more time for strategic projects," explains Johan Kenens. "Previously we had to focus too much on the day-to-day management of the IT infrastructure. Now Cheops takes care of most of the IT infrastructure management and this is going very well. Cheops is also responsible for the business continuity, including Disaster Recovery, backup, upgrades, capacity planning and proactive performance monitoring. The Cheops data centre, which we have already visited, is completely redundant. All this means peace of mind. Moreover, thanks to the flexibility of the Cheops Cloud, it is now very easy to configure new test machines quickly. We can have additional capacity in just a few minutes, so it is much easier to test and develop new applications."

Nautical information through digital maps

Brabo is now moving on to the next phases in its digital transformation. The applications for pilots and boatmen are also being dealt with. "Every day we publish several nautical messages such as depth charts, safety instructions and blocking hours, which together form an extensive library," explains Johan Kenens. "We are ready to store all those nautical messages in one geographical system. When pilots have to steer a certain route, they will see a map with the relevant information for their task. In this way, we want to enhance the pilots' and boatmen's situational awareness and, above all, increase safety."

Artificial intelligence and machine learning

The final step is the design of prediction models. "We will use artificial intelligence and machine learning for this," explains Koen De Groof. "It is about being able to make predictions about how busy the shipping traffic will be, so that we can further optimise the work schedules of our employees. The port authority are also asking for this. The better and more efficiently everything runs, the fewer delays in the port. In this way we can optimise the capacity of the port."

Brabo does not usually know long in advance – sometimes it is just an hour – when a ship is going to depart. "So we have to be able to react very quickly and handle peak periods, while at the same time needing to avoid that too many of our employees are present on the calmer moments," explains Koen De Groof. "This is all very complex, partly due to the available capacity of the locks and of the other nautical service providers. We also have to take the tides on the Scheldt and a number of other factors into account. With the help of AI and machine learning, we can automatically take all these influencing factors into account in our planning. The same goes for peak times: the pilots and boatmen are regularly called in during their free time. This happens even thousands of times a year. If the dispatcher can predict such peak times with the help of prediction models, it is easier to call in someone in time. So these kinds of innovative applications bring nothing but benefits to us, our customers and the port."

" Our own IT employees no longer have to work on routine tasks and they have more time for strategic projects. "

Johan Kenens,
IT Manager at Brabo

The Cheops solution

Benefits of the Cheops solution

- continuity of service
- access to expertise
- smooth communication
- reliability and security
- flexibility in deploying IT capacity
- scope for innovation

About Brabo

The core business of Brabo is the safe piloting, mooring and unmooring of ships. Each year the company carries out about 26,000 piloting assignments in Antwerp, as well as 36.000 mooring and unmooring tasks. The Brabo Group includes, in addition to the Pilotage & Mooring services, a Maritime Services department and the Brabo Academy. This trains new pilots with its own state-of-the-art manoeuvring simulator, which is also used for assessing new projects on behalf of the Port of Antwerp, terminals and shipping companies, among others. The Brabo Group has in Antwerp around 300 employees. Directly or through its subsidiaries, the company is also operating in the ports of Zeebrugge and Ostend, as well as on the Brussels–Scheldt Maritime Canal.

https://www.brabo.com