



Summary

Challenge

At Three Scandinavia, central IT operations are managed by a small workgroup of 9-10 people.

When one team member, responsible for the backup solution, was about to leave the company, it faced a need to recruit or train another person to acquire corresponding expert skills. Doing so was an apparent challenge.

Solution

Proact Premium Support+, an extended support service where Proact manages all regular backup operations for Three's data centres in Sweden.

Three Scandinavia

Support service adds key skills and relieves burden on IT operations team

At mobile service provider Three Scandinavia, the drive for continuous improvement and streamlining operations is deep-rooted. This dedication is perfectly illustrated by the company's highly efficient on-premises IT operations. A self-reliant company culture has served Three well, although this does not preclude seeking outside assistance: Proact was engaged to manage data centre backup.

At the start of the new millennium, the Three Group, also known under the single-digit brand "3", was founded as the mobile communications market was gearing up for the shift to 3G technology. This startup venture soon emerged as a success, as Three became one of the pioneers of an industry which continued to grow in Sweden and many international markets.

From the outset, Three Scandinavia relied on many enterprise systems which had been developed in-house. Therefore, it was a natural choice to keep IT operations on-premises. However, as data centre and software technology has evolved, outsourcing and cloud services have become more viable options.

The current state of the art in software development, using microservices or container-based applications, offers great flexibility when it comes to deployment options. A workload may be placed in the public cloud, on-premises, or in a hybrid environment, and migrated between these without the need to rewrite code. However, this freedom comes with new demands on the core infrastructure.

"We want to shape an environment which provides freedom of choice, and for this we need an infrastructure where we can bypass the virtual layer to enable faster deployment of server resources as required by the system," says Mikael Vinberg, Manager Infrastructure at Three Scandinavia.



We are flexible, just as Proact are very flexible too when it comes to how we work together. Although you find a lot in writing in contracts, we will have issues where it is not obvious who is responsible. And in these cases, we always find a solution that works out best for both parties"

Mikael Vinberg,
Manager Infrastructure
Three Scandinavia

Benefits

With an extended support service from Proact, a small team at Three Scandinavia can maintain on-premises IT operations. They are relieved from routine tasks involving daily backup which requires expert skills, while Proact also ensures that these are now available at all times. The flexible approach to collaboration, adapted by both parties, means that Proact's service delivery can quickly be adapted to present needs.

A part of the business culture at Three is that the company prefers making large investments upfront through purchases, accounted for as capital expenses (Capex), over service-based solutions which are operational expenses (Opex). Essentially though, this practice is not the result of financial management dictating purchasing strategy, but stems from a business culture imbued by the drive to operate as efficiently as possible.

"Our preferred approach is to work in a small, tight team where we make use of the best solutions available. We have a modern platform that works well for us and have never had a more stable and reliable environment than today," says Mikael Vinberg.

Benchmarking

Three Scandinavia has assigned independent experts to evaluate their data centre platform and organisation, to learn how they match up against comparable enterprises. This benchmarking indicates that no other option, e.g. outsourcing, would be able to match the on-premises IT operations at Three according to key performance indicators for cost efficiency or quality.

Despite this recognition, Three's IT team is always looking for ways to improve. Keeping an open mind towards new ideas and technology certainly helps in this pursuit.

"We like to stay at the leading edge of technology, and we are instinctively studying new solutions to learn what can be of use and if it would bring any value to us," says Mikael Vinberg.

In this context, it is an advantage for Three to be a young company in its industry:

"We have the opportunity to make quick decisions when adapting new technology which enables us to fully leverage new solutions."

One such instance deals with Flash storage, of which Three Scandinavia was an early adopter. Today these solutions are implemented across practically all of the production environment. An ongoing project at Three, which also entails a fair amount of innovative thinking, deals with building private cloud infrastructure using OpenStack, a rapidly growing cloud infrastructure platform based on open source code.

Fault tolerance

The infrastructure team at Three Scandinavia has built a highly available production environment using an active-active clustering concept. This provides a high level of fault tolerance where single hardware failures will not cause downtime. The setup allows for maintaining operations with a single data centre, covering even a worst-case disaster scenario.

"We have designed the production environment with the objective 'we should not have to get up at night'. Our mirrored, independent data centres provide nearly full geographic redundancy, and if something gets broken, we don't have to act on it immediately," says Mikael Vinberg.

Three has a long legacy of relying on a virtualised server environment using VMware's hypervisor and platform. From a background with various hardware suppliers, today Huawei servers and storage systems are used throughout in the company's data centres in Sweden, which also serve the Danish business.

For data centre backup, Three uses Commvault's data platform. This well-proven solution has also been managed in-house. But assigning these tasks became an issue when a team member who had a central role for daily backup was leaving the company. Three faced the option of either training another team member, recruiting a new expert to fill the role, or to find another solution.

"We felt that we already had enough tasks at hand to keep us busy, and that's why we chose to seek outside assistance," says Mikael Vinberg.



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About Proact

Proact is Europe's leading independent data centre and cloud services provider. By delivering flexible, accessible and IT solutions and services, we help companies and authorities reduce risk and costs, whilst increasing agility, productivity and efficiency.

We've completed over 5,000 successful projects around the world, have more than 3,500 customers and currently manage in excess of 100 petabytes of information in the cloud. We employ over 1,000 people in 15 countries across Europe and North America. Founded in 1994, our parent company, Proact IT Group AB (publ), was listed on Nasdaq Stockholm in 1999 (under the symbol PACT).

Solution

The choice fell on Premium Support+, an extended support service where Proact manages all regular backup operations. This relieves Three's team from the daily duties, while the company still owns and controls the backup solution. During onboarding and transfer of responsibilities, Proact staff have worked onsite, while regular backup tasks are now remotely managed.

With Premium Support+, Three also maintains control over their backups, not only from the fact that enterprise data physically stays on-premises, but by means of regular reporting and access to the monitoring platform. Additionally, Three has round-the-clock access to Proact's service desk and a self-service portal.

Proact also takes care of recurring backup management tasks which used to be staff duties, including upgrades, platform maintenance, coordination of support issues and vendor contacts with Commvault.

Proact's support services are delivered in-line with the ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) framework, a set of IT service management practices focused on aligning IT services with business needs. These include incident, problem and change management, as well as service reporting, health checks, release management, and more.

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Benefits



Skills supply

The right expert skills always available. No need for recruitment.



Unburdening

The IT operations team must no longer spend time on daily backup routines.



Cost control

Contract with fixed monthly fee facilitates budgeting.



Flexibility

Service delivery can easily be adapted to current needs.



Availability

Proact's service desk is available 24 hours, each day of the year.

About Three Scandinavia

Three Scandinavia (Hi3G Access AB) was founded in December 2000 with the vision to create an entirely new platform for mobile communications. Today, Three Scandinavia owns and operates 3G and 4G mobile networks in Sweden and Denmark, with about 2,000 employees. Three Scandinavia is part of the global Three Group which operates in 11 countries, owned by Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison, which holds a 60 percent share, and Swedish Investor AB, which holds 40 percent.
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