Kinnarps

IT as a Service helps furniture maker to better support the enterprise build a more flexible environment

For many years, Kinnarps has been ranked as one of the top European office furniture suppliers. Since its foundation in Sweden in 1942, the Kinnarps has grown into a workplace design group with sales in more than 40 countries. The company is still based in its hometown of Kinnarp, where the largest of the six manufacturing facilities is also located.

"We are a family business where we pay special attention to IT, which is part of our legacy. We do a lot of in-house application development, including adapting the ERP system to our manufacturing," says Sven Hellberg, Operational manager IT at Kinnarps.

IT as an enterprise backbone

Kinnarps' recipe for success includes a capable IT function which is mainly operated on-premise. Applications closest to the enterprise carries most weight for Kinnarps, which guides any decision about committing the company's own resources.

"One question we keep asking ourselves is if we should manage infrastructure in-house. The generic answer is that we want to source the "bread and butter" – basic functionality and applications, having that delivered as a service so we can put greater focus on IT close to the enterprise," says Sven Hellberg.

Kinnarps and Proact have been partners for more than a decade. Beginning with storage and backup, more components of Kinnarps' data centre and IT operations have been added over time.

Summary

Challenge
Kinnarps provides and manages IT mainly using its own resources, with ambitious goals for supporting and developing the business. The company wants to maintain control over IT infrastructure, while realising that this is an increasingly complex and demanding task.

Solution
Infrastructure as a Service with partial outsourcing through Systems Management by Proact, an ITIL based service.

Data centre solution based on Cisco UCS servers running VMware ESXi and NetApp storage technology (FAS with MetroCluster).

Storage as a Service and Backup as a Service by Proact, with volume-based fees.

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Sven Hellberg,
Operational Manager IT
Kinnarps

The format and contractual terms have also evolved, from providing hardware, data centre solutions and tech support to a continuous collaboration where service-based delivery has a growing share.
Guided by the "close to the enterprise" motto, it is no longer a given for Kinnarps to

rely on its own team for data center operations.
"In several areas, including security, we are facing increasing requirements on expert skills which are difficult both to recruit and to maintain. And for us to deliver on the tasks we are assigned, it is no longer reasonable that we do it all ourselves," says Sven Hellberg.

The 'should we manage this in-house' question surfaced once again as Kinnarps considered updating its primary data centre, with new servers and an upgrade of the VMware virtualisation platform.

Scalability gives flexibility

Kinnarps found the right solution in a set of matching services, which together essentially form a private cloud where Proact provides and runs the infrastructure, including hardware and software for the virtualised data centre environment. The company has retained management of the upper layers, including business applications.

This change is not immediately visible. Hardware remains installed at Kinnarps' data centre, while Proact remotely manages the regular operations. The solution also includes storage and backup services by Proact. As a customer, Kinnarps only pays for usage and eliminates the need for making capital investments in storage or servers.

The infrastructure solution comes with a clear division of responsibilities between Kinnarps and Proact. Kinnarps' IT team delivers application services to the company's business units, while Proact provides infrastructure services to Kinnarps IT.

"For us, scalability is the biggest advantage with having infrastructure as a service. It's easy to grow and to reduce usage. This makes us more responsive towards the business and its needs. If we purchase and own each component, carrying the investment costs means that we cannot always be so flexible towards the enterprise," says Sven Hellberg.

Better collaboration with Microsoft 365

The end user environment at Kinnarps has also recently taken a significant step forward, by implementing Microsoft 365. The plans to migrate on-premise Office applications, including email, to the cloud had evolved over a long time, and the Covid-19 pandemic gave reason to accelerate this project.

Email is the most critical application in this context, and Kinnarps faced the choice of either replacing their aging Exchange servers, which were costly to operate, or taking the step to the cloud. The decision was made easier by the fact that Microsoft 365 offers so much more than the old Office environment, not least new collaboration tools.

"The pandemic changed the fundamentals for how we can work together as a team, and from that followed a need for better collaborative tools. Now we are making good use of Microsoft's apps, not least Teams," says Sven Hellberg.

The Microsoft 365 deployment began with a pilot installation for 170 users. The migration was then conducted in two stages where some 1,800 employees and more than 2,000 user accounts in total were transferred.

On-premise backup – including cloud data

A key issue for the migration project concerned the backup requirements. Many organizations that have introduced Microsoft 365 rely solely on the solid data protection and disaster recovery capabilities that the base service offers. But for Kinnarps, it was still important to have their own backup stored outside the cloud, not least for email.

This need was conveniently covered by Kinnarps extending their use of Backup as a Service from Proact. This service is based on Commvault's data protection platform, which supports both on-premise IT environments and all major public cloud services (In addition to Microsoft 365, Kinnarps also uses Azure).

"Now we can manage all our backups through a single interface, for cloud data and what we keep inhouse. There are obvious synergies from this," says Sven Hellberg.

How Proact helped

Kinnarps' IT-infrastructure is covered by Service Management, the most comprehensive support option provided by Proact. This service includes complete, ITIL based operations management for Kinnarps' data centre, including systems monitoring, tech support and incident management.

"By and large, we have a solid working partnership, including support. Proact is responsive to our needs, for instance to conduct systems upgrades outside production hours, tuned to our overall maintenance cycle. For us, who deliver basic services supporting the enterprise, it's essential to have a partner who understands this, and who stays on call at unsocial working hours," says Sven Hellberg.

Benefits

Flexibility
With infrastructure as a service, IT delivery can quickly be adapted to shifting enterprise requirements

Expertise
Round the clock access to expert support

Cost control
e-based, well-defined fees. Reduces need for capital investments

Business focus
More time to spend on business-supporting IT

About Kinnarps

Kinnarps is one of Europe's largest office furniture suppliers. The company's entire value chain, from raw materials to complete workplace design solutions, is characterised by high quality and a light environmental footprint. The Kinnarps Group has over 1,900 employees and annual sales of more than SEK 3.5 billion. Kinnarps was founded in 1942 and remains a privately held family business today. www.kinnarps.com

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 800 people in 13 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).

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