

PostFinance Modernizes Front-End Systems with Reflection X

Improves quality of work for users



Two years ago, PostFinance, a subsidiary of Swiss Post, started looking for ways to improve the efficiency of its IT operation. “We wanted to respond more flexibly to the demands of the market while also improving the work processes of our 1,600 users,” said Fauzia Candrian, head of ZV IS GUI and Evaluations at PostFinance. After a step-by-step review of its IT landscape, the company decided to modernize the GUI of its front-end systems with Attachmate® Reflection® X.

Headquartered in Bern, Switzerland, PostFinance is a full-service financial institute that serves 2.3 million customers via 2,500 post offices and 28 service centers. All PostFinance’s business-critical applications, including payment transaction applications, reside on Hewlett-Packard machines running OpenVMS. These core applications are accessed by users in multiple areas, such as customer service, back office, and sales.

In 1998, approximately 800 workplaces were equipped with PCs running Reflection X, Attachmate’s PC X server software, to enable access to PostFinance’s core applications for domestic payment transactions (ZV-IS). Reflection X lets Windows® users access graphical and character-based applications running in UNIX, Linux, and OpenVMS environments. A PC X server with integrated GLX support and integrated terminal emulation, Reflection X is known for superior speed and precision as well as efficient, time-saving management tools.

A Time-Consuming, Error-Prone Process

The PC users equipped with Reflection X were able to access Windows applications (Word and Excel), e-mail, the Internet, and the company’s core applications. The central server transmitted data to the Reflection X server in X-11 protocol format. The Reflection X server then used this data to generate an emulated Windows GUI.

QUICK VIEW

Problem

Application-access process was time-consuming and error-prone, with negative impacts on customer service.

Solution

Deployed Reflection X on new PCs, rather than updating OpenVMS workstations, to streamline information access.

Results

- Saved the replacement cost of new workstations.
- Reduced customer wait times.
- Simplified and streamlined work processes.
- Minimized user errors.
- Improved customer service.
- Supported the company’s long-term IT plans.

For approximately 700 other users, however, day-to-day work was more cumbersome. In addition to a PC for accessing Office applications, they also used an OpenVMS workstation for accessing the core applications. A switch box connected to the workstation and the PC allowed these users to switch back and forth between the Windows applications and the core applications.

This hybrid solution proved to be time-consuming and error-prone. For example, simple cut-and-paste operations were impossible. When users needed to import a customer number from a core application into an Office document, they had to write down the data on a slip of paper and then enter it manually—when the required application was active. Ultimately, the lack of integration between applications had a negative impact on customer service.

The company’s migration from DEC Ada to GNAT Ada in 2005 further drove the need for modernization. To ensure continued access to the core systems, PostFinance had to either perform a memory upgrade on roughly 700

OpenVMS workstations or replace them with new machines—an expensive undertaking. The memory upgrade alone would cost about 1,000 Swiss francs per workstation. Because 170 of the workstations were obsolete; replacement was the logical option. But a substantial 5,000 to 6,000 francs would need to be spent for every system, just to keep the existing switch-box solution alive.

The Reflection Alternative

To meet its work flow objectives while holding costs down, PostFinance decided to replace the 700 OpenVMS workstations with new, more powerful PCs running Reflection X. Because the IT team was already familiar with the product, very little external consulting services had to be bought in. That fact, combined with Attachmate's stability and financial security, solidified the decision.

Candrian and her 14-person team executed the project in multiple stages. The first step was to establish contact with users to see how they worked with the system on a daily basis. Then, to ease the transition for users, favorite features from the old hybrid world were implemented in the new environment. For example, the old Digital keyboards had twenty function keys, while a PC keyboard has only twelve, so the team reprogrammed the control and shift keys to maintain a familiar keyboard environment.

The realization phase began with a pilot installation at the Bern headquarters and a second operations center in St. Gallen. About twenty users were involved, and the initial experience gained there proved useful for the further implementation. Before all ZV-IS-GUI users could actually work on PCs running Reflection, the obsolete application servers had to be replaced. Powerful new servers were installed in each of the operation centers over several weekends. "Our people tested the system on Saturday and then resolved problems and issues immediately," said Candrian. This process ensured "business as usual" on Monday morning.

The workplaces needed to be prepared as well. The team needed to upgrade PC memory, replace old PCs and all monitors smaller than 18 inches, install PC keyboards, and install the Reflection software.

The final step was user training. On rollout day, the project managers were on site with the developers to ensure that users received immediate support in the event of any problems. Using this staged approach, one operations center per month was switched over to the new technology.

The hard work and detailed planning paid off. "Our users now have uniform access to their systems, and the expansion potential that we have gained fits our IT architecture concept well," said Candrian. What's more, users no

What You Can Do with Reflection X

- Connect Windows users to graphical and character-based applications on UNIX, Linux, and OpenVMS hosts.
- Leverage the benefits of new desktop platforms, such as Microsoft Windows XP x64 Edition (native).
- Work in multiple X screens for a single server instance.
- Meet the stringent FIPS 140-2 and DOD-PKI security requirements.
- Protect critical data using Reflection's fully integrated SSH and Kerberos clients.
- Provide fast, secure access to multiple hosts with simplified sign-on.
- Use certificates to authenticate to host applications.
- Simplify certificate use with Reflection Certificate Manager.

longer need to switch between systems—saving users' time, streamlining work flow, and improving overall customer service. The error rate is also reduced since the copy function allows data to be pasted into target applications.

"We are pleased that the operative departments are so satisfied with the new solution and are reporting significant improvements in their processes," said Candrian. What's more, a simple comparison of the two options—the purchase of new workstations versus Reflection—shows that the new solution will quickly pay for itself.



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