Nianet: Getting your data centre in order

Nianet is a professional fibre network provider headquartered in Denmark. One of Nianet's business areas is providing co-location services, where companies can lease racks or entire server rooms in one of their five state-of-the-art data centres located across Denmark. Nianet manages over 4,000 square metres of co-location space, and reading power meters in such an expansive environment proved to be a daunting task.

**PER SKOVGAARD ROSEN
CTO, NIANET**

"We are an organization with entrepreneurial roots," relates Per Skovgaard Rosen, Nianet's Chief Technology Officer (CTO). "Which means we had a number of legacy systems that had been acquired and combined over the years. Things were not standardized, which made meter reading a challenge."

Many of Nianet's meters were not equipped with any type of remote-reading functionality, meaning that a person had to check each one manually. The scope of Nianet's operation alone made this a challenging task, but the challenge was compounded by the meters' various locations. "We had meters placed in different, hard-to-reach places: under the floor, up in the ceiling. It was a manual process that took days and was very prone to human error. Meters would be overlooked, and if the regular meter reader was sick or on holiday, it was very difficult to bring someone else into the process as they were unfamiliar with the system."

Once the power consumption figures were gathered, the manual process continued, as the numbers were then entered into a spreadsheet and passed on to the Finance Department. Faced with a manual, time-consuming process, Nianet decided there must be a better way to go about it. "We had so many internal discussions about the accuracy of the numbers. We needed to find a reliable solution that would help us automate this process and give us accurate data."

Defining their requirements

Nianet had a very specific idea of what type of solution they were looking for. "It needed to be flexible," recalls Per. "We didn't want to switch out our existing meters, so it needed to support different protocols and integrate with our existing environment of solutions and equipment." They were also looking for a system they could integrate with their own customer portal, so that their colocation customers could track their own power usage as well. Given their list of very specific requirements, finding a vendor wasn't easy. "Many of the solutions we found weren't designed optimally for our needs, and we didn't have the possibility of adapting them to our environment."

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Seeing the benefits of a hosted solution

After a few months of searching, Nianet began investigating Powerapp. "What I appreciated about Powerapp was that they had a product that met our minimum requirements, and they were also willing to work with us to find the right solution for our unique environment."

Yet there were concerns. First, there was the question of how secure a hosted solution would be. "In terms of security, the fact that it runs with 2-factor authentication is a definite plus," comments Per. Other features of Powerapp's service also helped to

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allay security concerns. All data transmissions are encrypted, so Nianet's data is never exposed at any point in the meter reading process. And in the event of an interruption of service, Nianet always stores a local copy of all data, so nothing is lost.

Then there was a concern about cost. "It was a definite advantage to have a pay-as-you-go model. This helped us avoid a large, up-front investment. Yes, we pay a monthly fee, but it's a known cost that we can account for in our budget. And when you compare the subscription costs to all of the time and money we spent with the manual process, it's a significant improvement. And we are a more efficient business as a result."

Nianet came to the conclusion that the benefits far outweighed the reservations. And in the end, it was about keeping pace with the evolution of the IT industry. "As someone who's been in the IT sector for decades, it is an adjustment to know that the solution is hosted off-site. But we had to recognize that hosted solutions are the way the business is going, and we have to adapt accordingly."

Getting a handle on their energy consumption

Nianet's forward-thinking approach proved to be a boon for their business. The benefits of having a system like Powerapp became evident quite early on in the partnership. During the implementation phase, Nianet was able to identify irregularities in their customers' power usage. They identified faulty meters and other sources of revenue leakage. "The implementation phase was a great opportunity to clean up our shop," comments Per. "We began to examine our entire power infrastructure and identified areas where we were wasting energy." This cleanup effort resulted in a savings of 15% on their monthly electricity bill, which translated to tens of thousands of euros each month.

Powerapp has also had a positive impact on Nianet's customer relationships. "Today, our customers can monitor their power consumption online. As an IT manager, this information is invaluable.

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