

Other People's Money

Few people really miss the freewheeling days of the Internet as they existed before the turn of the last century. Uncontrolled, unregulated, and open to misuse of both privacy and existing laws, the Internet was more like the Wild West than an interconnected network of computer resources. Now this massive worldwide resource is being put to constructive use and – for banks and financial services in particular – the Web offers lucrative long-term potential for welldeployed e-commerce services.

This is particularly true for online trading and banking which is experiencing enormous growth. Even in Germany, which only has a population of 80 million, the daily amount of data transmitted via the Internet has reached terabyte proportions.

The challenge now is to ensure that this massive volume of sensitive customer data actually arrives securely at the correct location. Banks and financial service providers have obtained a high level of trust from their clients, gained through years of secure, reputable business. They have no wish to see this trust squandered in the move to online transactions.

Responsibility for ensuring that this trust is maintained in the online area lies firmly in the hands of application service providers. The solutions they offer must include fail-safe, error-free data transmission and network technology in addition to high levels of professionalism in handling sensitive customer data.

Apart from standard data encryption and data protection policies and solutions, the security of the ASPs' IT systems is a key component in winning clients for their online data processing services.

Sensitive data requires reliable systems

Elaxy is a software development company as well as an outsourcing partner for banks and financial service providers. The company employs more than 200 people at three German sites in Coburg, Jever and Puchheim.

For more than 20 years, Elaxy has offered a comprehensive service and solution portfolio for such markets as construction finance, financial trading in retail banking, brokerage, stock trading and online banking.



Security is ensured

Online banking demands the highest possible degree of data availability and security. To ensure long-term success, ASPs active within the field of financial services and banking must offer clients a business contingency concept that is absolutely fail-safe.

In addition, ASPs must also implement solutions that ensure all conceivable potential problems are eliminated. Elaxy Brokerage & Trading GmbH & Co. KG, based in Coburg, Germany, offers its business partners an extraordinary high level of security using DBShadow, a time-delayed database mirroring solution.

In the past few years, the outsourcing business has grown to become an important element in Elaxy's total portfolio.

Elaxy's data center at Coburg provides system and software services to external companies based on an ASP (Application Service Providing) model. An essential element in this model is a solution to handle the large volumes of sensitive data amassed as part of their clients' everyday activities. That means ensuring this data is collected, stored, transmitted and erased in a manner consistent with the everyday processes of each client.

The field in which Elaxy operates is a particularly demanding one. On one hand, as a service provider, Elaxy must provide up-to-date software solutions and this can mean adopting new technologies at a very early stage. On the other hand, Elaxy must maintain the high levels of reliability and security required to meet the needs of their clients.

Furthermore, Elaxy's computer systems must constantly exchange data with the legal systems of their clients. This means Elaxy must comply with exactly the same level of German data protection and security standards as the client's backend system.

There are many possible reasons why data loss or system failure can occur. These include both external and internal reasons that can result from either human or technical error, but in any case the result would be the same for Elaxy – catastrophe for both their firm and their clients. That is why Elaxy places the utmost emphasis on security management so that all potential risks can be thoroughly eliminated.

Safety on all sites

Elaxy's disaster protection is based on a multi-tier strategy that covers both hardware and software. An error-free database must be continually available and accessible from any authorized location at any time so that, in the event of data loss or a system crash, the system can be restored to its original state as smoothly and as quickly as possible.

For Elaxy, a complete disaster recovery plan consists of far more than such elements as backups, firewalls, server clustering and RAID storage. It also includes innovative software solutions such as DBShadow.

DBShadow is a time-delayed high availability solution that offers full database protection. The concept is simple: By creating a copy of the database and then recording all subsequent transactions onto the copy, it is possible to switch the entire application to the mirror copy when required – such as in the event of data corruption. As transactions must be “committed” to the mirrored database, it is easy for Elaxy to “turn back the clock” to the moment before the corruption occurred – allowing processing to resume without errors.

A switch to the mirror can be accomplished in a matter of minutes and this provides a significant advantage for Elaxy. A restore from backup media would take hours and, in addition, require further database reconstruction. Instead, for Elaxy, the switch is virtually instantaneous, while for the client it is all but transparent.



„The Critical challenge for our data center is to guarantee fail-safe implementation of the highest security standard whilst maintaining a 24/7 uptime.“

Olaf Salzer, Key Account Manager, Elaxy

Elaxy implemented DBShadow with full automatic notification and switching options, but the solution can also be easily monitored from the Graphical User Interface (GUI). The GUI also provides information on the current status of the production and mirrored systems, as well as the databases.

Through its functionality, DBShadow offers full protection against logical errors, such as the accidental deletion of database tables. It also protects against data corruption that may occur, for example, during the failure of a controller in a server or through a malfunction in the operating system environment.

Elaxy further improved their protection against external threats and increased their overall availability by installing the mirror database and transaction storage at a remote location. In this way, Elaxy's clients can rest assured that their databases are protected even against such events as earthquakes, hurricanes and terrorist attacks.

Hardware-based high availability is insufficient

For Elaxy the critical advantage of DBShadow over traditional high availability solutions is the speed of the time-delayed database mirror.

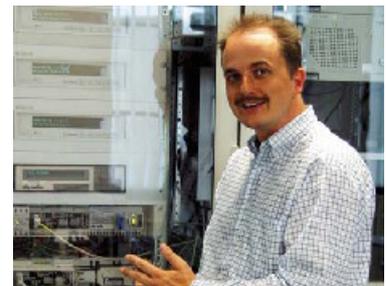
While RAID or clustering solutions provide protection against technical failures, such as a disk crash or server failure, they offer no protection against logical failures.

Other high availability technologies first require a restore to be completed and then a database recovery session. In comparison, DBShadow involves a simple switch to an alternative, error-free database. Since no time is lost, no money is lost – keeping both Elaxy and the client happy.

Trust your IT

There is no such thing as a free lunch. Convincing concepts for data processing security require investments – not only to purchase a software solution but also to maintain it in terms of both software and IT resources.

The DBShadow solution supports Elaxy's objective for a reduced TCO by functioning as a type of insurance system against errors. Each malfunction could potentially cost the company far more than their investment in DBShadow. In the end, a complete, comprehensive security concept that also protects against data corruption pays off in other ways for Elaxy. The company is able to offer clients a trusted environment in which data errors can be recovered in minutes – providing confidence that their IT environment is protected against any threat.



Both companies also profit from each other's know-how. "We recommend DBShadow to our customers when they ask for our hosting services. We are convinced DBShadow is a modern, sophisticated and complete high availability solution suitable for even the highest demands. This partnership improves our standing with our customers", says Olaf Salzer in conclusion.

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