



# Case Study

## Small, Compact and Problem-Free

Basler Insurance has implemented new thin clients – the stability, flexibility and efficient management of the new devices from IGEL are most impressive.

Business Solutions and  
IGEL Technology





# Small, Compact and Problem-Free

For over 140 years, Basler Insurance (Basler Versicherungen) has been active on the German market. With its comprehensive lines of insurance products for private customers, business and industry as well as first-class consulting services, the company, with some 1300 employees, is now among the top 30 insurance companies in Germany. Part of the company's IT strategy includes finding ways to minimize risks and being cost-conscious. A key part of this approach is the centralized provision of host-based and Windows®-based applications over a standardized thin-client infrastructure.

In all of its offices in Germany, Basler Insurance has a total of about 400 thin-client users. "We've been using thin clients since we started using Citrix back in 2000," reports Jens Borg, head of the Information Center at Basler Insurance. At the core of the server-based computing architecture at Basler, there are some 40 terminal servers running Citrix Presentation Server. "By making applications available from central servers to low-maintenance and remotely-administered end devices in our different locations, we've succeeded in permanently cutting our support costs," Borg noted. In the future, in addition to accessing Microsoft Office applications, the end devices at these locations are to also have interactive access to a central DB2 database. In 2007, evolving technical requirements made it necessary to replace the first-generation thin clients with new ones.

## The customer

- One of the top 30 insurance companies in Germany
- 1300 employees
- Thin Clients in all of its offices in Germany

## Simultaneous Host Access and Windows® Access

The planned investment in replacement units provided the insurance company with the perfect opportunity to thoroughly modernize its thin-client infrastructure. "We were looking for a durable table-top unit with a sturdy housing and at least three USB connections, some of them accessible from the front to make it easy to connect additional devices like external CD-ROM drives," said Borg. "In addition, we also needed VGA and DVI interfaces for dualview operation. After doing some research on the Internet and getting recommendations, we took a good look at the German thin-client provider IGEL Technology. We found that its flagship model, the IGEL-5210 LX Premium, met all of our criteria. The IGEL devices let us implement our deployment scenario in an ideal way. Our users have access to Microsoft® standard applications, Lotus Notes, the Internet as well as the IBM host system."

## Digital Services Make Thin Clients Flexible

What makes the IGEL models especially suitable for this modernization project at Basler Insurance is due in large part to the broad spectrum of digital services that are also available. Along with the usual communications protocols for server-based Windows®, Linux and Citrix environments, these services include terminal emulation for direct access to

## The challenge

- Modern thin client generation
- Simultaneous host and Windows® access
- flexibility and efficient management

host systems combined with locally installed software for preparing and processing information in different formats. This means, that in addition to a browser, the IGEL firmware also integrates a complete Java environment, a PDF reader and a media player. Local installation and operation of such frequently used programs helps to conserve server resources and bandwidth within the enterprise network. The digital services used at Basler Insurance include the typical Citrix ICA and Microsoft® RDP communications protocols, 3270 terminal emulation, Telnet, printing via TCP/IP as well as Mozilla Firefox as the local browser. This firmware and all



digital services are regularly updated and made available through the IGEL website at no charge. Overall, there are about 400 units of model IGEL-5210 LX in place at different company offices. Basler Insurance has about 500 notebooks and 500 PCs in service as well.

#### Simple and Secure Management

When it comes to system management, Basler Insurance also had some important fundamental requirements and expectations of the new thin-client solution. "For us, the most important features in remote management included the easy setup of the remote administration software as well as easy creation and management of groups and individual profiles," explained Borg. "In fact, the suite's interface is so intuitive and easy to understand that, if necessary, even a new, inexperienced member of the support staff could easily find his way around. The interface functions according to the familiar 'drag & drop' principle, cut down on management time." A frequently used tool in the IGEL Remote Management Suite is the Virtual Network Computing (VNC) viewer. This 'shadowing solution' allows a currently running terminal server session to be displayed on any thin client in the network. "As soon as a customer or user calls in, it's absolutely necessary for support staff to be immediately able to connect into the caller's session quickly and easily from any location," said Borg. "To facilitate this, we give certain support personnel the administrative rights to do this. This can also be done using the IGEL management solution." To increase the availability of the thin-client infrastructure, a reliable method of applying firmware updates was also needed. "This basic requirement is met by the IGEL fail-safe mechanism," said Borg. "For instance, if a sudden power outage occurs during an update or if a data packet is somehow incorrectly transmitted, the previous configuration is then automatically restored. With this mechanism in place, our thin clients remain 100% operational."

#### Fast Implementation, Low Investment Costs

Since the necessary infrastructure including the Citrix server was already in place, the only thing Basler Insurance had to do was organize the rollout of the new end units. "The migration to IGEL was purely a matter of logistics," recalled Borg. "We had already previously made thin-client architecture the standard in our planning." The IT manager describes the



individual phases of the change-over as follows: "After we had created the requirement specification, we selected different possible providers and asked them for product demonstrations and test units for evaluation. After we had decided to go with IGEL, we implemented the training program and the setup of the Remote Management Suite. After a second test phase, we finally went ahead and ordered the systems. The rollout and the initial user instruction was done with external support." Because the devices could be preconfigured using IGEL's management software, the IT team at Basler Insurance was able to convert about 40 workstations per day. Jens Borg noted, however, that the total amount of effort cannot be exactly determined since the project had to be pretty much done on the side. The direct costs associated with the conversion were purely limited to the acquisition of the thin clients plus the consulting costs for the rollout. Management software and digital services are already included with the IGEL products.

#### Low Costs, High Acceptance

Now that the rollout phase is complete, Basler Insurance has achieved the initially planned thin-client coverage of just about

30 percent, which means that the network infrastructure is now also centrally available at all external locations. "This step has considerably simplified matters and is further cutting costs because all the critical primary services – firewall, proxy, file services and backup systems – are now only necessary at the terminal server in the computer center." In addition to the better performance of this management solution and the high stability of the thin clients themselves, Basler Insurance is also benefiting from the future-ready aspects of the IGEL solution. "With the large spectrum of digital services that IGEL offers us, we'll be able to keep many good options open," noted Borg. "For instance, we're considering implementing certificate-based VPN access via DSL or ISDN. Beyond that, we also want to investigate additional multiview scenarios." Jens Borg has also observed a pleasant side effect of changing over to the IGEL solution and that is that server-based work is now much more appealing to company

personnel: "The IGEL thin clients are small, compact and problem-free, which has greatly improved their acceptance by our users. Our administrators are also extremely pleased. In particular, they're benefiting from less time spent on support and management duties. Since the amount of time and effort spent in these areas is noticeably less than with the previous thin-client arrangement, we can now devote more time to other IT tasks."

#### The solution

- 400 IGEL LX Premium thin clients
- higher flexibility with digital services, dualview, etc.
- easy management, secure firmware updates

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