

DAK

Unternehmen Leben



Case Study

DAK (Deutsche Angestellten Krankenkasse)

Business Solutions from
IGEL Technology



thin clients | development | services | solutions

Many functions. One device.



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(Deutsche Angestellten Krankenkasse)

In support of its newly restructured business processes, Deutsche Angestellten Krankenkasse (DAK), one of Germany's leading national health insurers, is replacing 5,000 old thin clients with IGEL units featuring significantly improved graphics capability. With their large TFT displays and multi-screen capability, the new IGEL thin clients are making IT workstations more productive, and the on-board IGEL digital services are helping to safeguard this major hardware investment.

DAK is a modern health services provider active throughout Germany. As a self-administrated corporate entity under public law, DAK serves 4.7 million members and 6 million insured. Its more than 14,000 employees work in some 830 branch offices throughout Germany. Individualized policy premiums, supplementary insurance plans and a 24-hour customer-service hotline are just some examples of DAK's commitment to service, one that is also reflected in the high quality of its own IT systems.

Modernizing the Thin Client System

About six years after the first generation of thin-client workstations had been deployed at DAK, it was now high time to upgrade this system. At the same time, a restructuring of internal business processes provided the impetus to install new units to meet these new requirements. Among other changes, certain company functions, such as those covering memberships and premium payments, were now going to be concentrated in specialized departments. As a result of this restructuring, fundamental IT applications such as content/

The customer

- A modern health insurance company active throughout Germany
- Some 4.7 million members and 6.0 million insured
- More than 12,000 customer service representatives employed at some 900 offices

document management systems also had to be modernized. "Basically, what happened is that the original thin clients simply could not handle the new requirements brought about by the new arrangement," states Stefan Kraus, a group manager at DAK's IT Services division. "On the one hand, we needed larger monitors and thin clients with superior graphics hardware that could handle them. That's because we were replacing our 15" TFT displays with 22" ones running at a higher resolution. On the other hand, the thin clients also had to be able to handle simultaneous operation of two 19" TFT screens." DAK placed the project out to bid throughout Europe and received offers from four different manufacturers of thin clients. Of the four, the German company IGEL Technology won out with the most cost-effective solution. "We'd already known about IGEL because of the earlier merging of different computer centers to become IT-Allianz / BITMARCK, which offers application development and other services to the German statutory health insurance market. The information system departments in the "ISKV," a software developer and provider serving over 200 German statutory health insurance companies, had already done a lot of work with IGEL and were thus a good, reliable reference for us within the health insurance field."



Small Model, Great Graphics

DAK finally decided to go with the IGEL's economical entry-level model, the IGEL LX Smart. Here's what Herbert Rode, the project manager in charge of the hardware replacement effort, has to say: "Despite its low price and small footprint, this model gave us the DVI interface that we wanted with a specific wide-screen resolution of 1680x1050 pixels. In addition, there's also a VGA connection that allows simultaneous operation of a second monitor. We conducted extensive tests and also took related electronic measurements to confirm that this unit would indeed meet our graphics requirements. The fact that we had very quickly found the right thin client made it much easier for us to select the right monitor. We tested the IGEL thin client with displays from the monitor companies that had bid on the project, and it wasn't long before we had found a suitable model. In fact, the test phase took all of 4 weeks." Typical user scenarios for IGEL LX Smart can be found throughout all of DAK's offices; in fact, all of DAK's branch offices are equipped with thin clients. The two-screen solution is used predominantly in the accounting department, where this configuration allows scanned-in TIFF files and the input mask on the host application to be conveniently viewed on two separate displays. "We publish our applications with Citrix Program Neighborhood so that they look just like local installations on a PC. IGEL supports this function with an integrated agent included in the management solution that comes with their thin clients. IGEL even customized its device firmware to provide the same benefits and user-friendliness when using two screens."

Virtual Desktops

Besides their outstanding graphics capabilities, the small IGEL units also can flexibly connect to centralized IT infrastructures in many ways. Although this range of digital services and deployment technologies did not play nearly as much of a role as graphics performance in evaluating bidders' proposals, some of these services and technologies are, in fact, going to prove to be very helpful once the rollout is completed. Bernd Gordon-Hall, a system programmer in charge of administering the thin clients at the DAK computer center, points out the following long term benefits: "Compared to PCs, a major advantage of thin clients is their expected service life cycle of about six years. Beyond this, replacing a faulty thin client with

another one is much easier, faster and cheaper than replacing a PC with its long installation routines. So, when you look at it from this angle, it's nice to know that IGEL also provides technologies and solutions that are ready for the future, even now." Along with the Citrix ICA Client for the Citrix environment, DAK also uses the integrated Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP) protocol as a second access method for administrative purposes. In the long term, however, access to virtual desktops could also be implemented since the thin clients are already pre-configured to support such consolidation. Clients like VDM 2.0, which supports VMware VDI, or Leostream as well as an ICA client capable of accessing a Citrix XenDesktop all come standard in IGEL firmware. IGEL units can also be equipped with optional smart card readers, a feature that will no doubt prove invaluable when the new "smart" health insurance cards are issued.

The challenge

- Modernize the thin client infrastructure in response to a major restructuring of business processes
- Deploy dual-monitor workstations as well as workstations with modern 22" TFT displays
- Achieve standardized management and a fast rollout

Rolling Out 100 Thin Clients Each Day

To accommodate the new IGEL topology, the IT administrators had to change their management approach, as Stefan Kraus, a group manager at DAK's IT Services division, reports: "The previous system was structured a bit differently, but, even so, the migration to the new setup went very smoothly with no problems. The IGEL Remote Management Suite, which comes standard with IGEL units, is intuitive and really easy to use. The integrated wizards guide you through the set up process and provide you with an easily configured overview of the entire pool of IGEL units. All it takes is a few mouse clicks. As is usually the case for a large organization like DAK, we're also very interested in having efficient and secure update mechanisms in place. When installing new firmware in large offices, we use the IGEL "buddy update" function. For the rollout, we're using the configurable auto-login function in the IGEL Remote Management Suite. During

the planning phase, we create the necessary group profiles and rules, and the thin clients are assigned to their proper locations based on ranges of IP addresses. This means that the thin clients already have their company settings when they're connected. They then automatically log on to the management server, from which each one obtains the configuration that matches its IP address. This smooth, seamless process makes them immediately ready for use. Using this method, we're able to deploy at least 100 new units each day with minimal effort."

Cost-Conscious Desktop Strategy

As Stefan Kraus sees it, there's no question that the previous adoption of server-based computing (SBC) and thin clients was the right way to go: "The current migration has been so smooth and problem-free because we've been able to draw on our previous experiences with thin clients. This made changing the thin-client supplier painless." The Citrix farm at DAK has about 350 servers; overall, DAK has more than 1,000 servers in use. DAK has 13,000 thin clients, and 5,000 of them will be replaced with new IGEL units by this fall. In a second rollout phase, the remaining ones are to be replaced by the beginning of 2010. "The total number of PCs here has now dropped to 800. There are also still about 850 notebooks being used by our field reps." Yet even these notebook users can access the Citrix environment by means of UMTS or DSL.

This means that, in one way or another, all of DAK's 12,000 employees have access to the terminal server. "At DAK, those who only store data locally do so at their own risk. To promote the concept of centralized data storage, these notebooks are also automatically synchronized and updated. The remaining desktop PCs in use are usually running some kind of exotic, specialized software. Even in this case, we can well imagine having these applications virtually available on IGEL thin clients in the future." At any rate, based on his experiences so far, this possible step also looks promising to Kraus. "We're very glad that we decided to go with IGEL products. Both the hardware and software are very stable and already include some very useful options for meeting future needs."

The solution

- Investment in replacement units (phase I): 5,000 IGEL LX Smart thin clients with standard DVI and VGA interfaces, a dualview option and high-resolution graphics
- A new supplier of thin clients, providing stable hardware and software
- IGEL Remote Management Suite, featuring intuitive operation and efficient firmware updates with the "buddy update" system

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