

Energy Industry Leader Chooses Cisco HyperFlex and Cisco Intersight Over Public Cloud

EXMAR · Industry: Energy · Size: 2000 employees · Location: Antwerp, Belgium

EXMAR is a provider of floating solutions for the energy industry. Its specialized ships, infrastructure, and services support the offshore extraction, transportation, and transformation of natural gases, petrochemical gases, and liquid hydrocarbons. For more information, visit exmar.be.



Challenges

- Simplify and accelerate IT operations
- Increase infrastructure resiliency
- Improve application performance

Results

- Modernized data centers at a lower cost than cloud and other hyperconverged options
- Decreased application latency from 200 to five milliseconds
- Sped up server deployments from days to minutes

Solutions

- Cisco HyperFlex[™] system
- Cisco Unified Computing System[™] (Cisco UCS[®])
- Cisco Intersight[™] infrastructure management
- Cisco[®] Nexus 9000 Series Switches
- Cisco Umbrella™ security
- Cisco Identity Services Engine (Cisco ISE)
- Cisco Email Security

For more information

- <u>Cisco HyperFlex</u>
- <u>Cisco UCS</u>
- <u>Cisco Intersight</u>
- <u>Cisco Nexus 9000</u>
- <u>Cisco Umbrella</u>
- <u>Cisco ISE</u>
- <u>Cisco Email Security</u>

Challenge: Simplify IT operations to support a continuously changing business

EXMAR is used to change. Operating in the highly dynamic energy industry–where pricing, geopolitical, and economic instability is the norm– the company has been reinventing itself for the better part of a decade.

"We've been in the shipping business for more than a century, but transporting gas from Point A to Point B eventually became a commodity," explains David De Roock, ICT infrastructure project manager at EXMAR. "We had to completely change our business."

EXMAR expanded its focus from straightforward energy transportation to multifaceted energy transformation. It pioneered the use of floating barges for mid-sea energy processing and transfers, helping avoid port-based limitations and costs. It established a fleet of specialized vessels and crews that can be rented or leased. And it continues to meet customer needs through differentiated maritime services and logistical support.

"We do a lot of different projects, and many of them are customized," De Roock says. "Our business is much more diversified and complex than it used to be."

What's good for business is challenging for IT, and the two-person team managing EXMAR's IT infrastructure was struggling to maintain pace. Deploying new computing resources took several days, software and firmware updates took production systems offline, and many nights and weekends were spent in the server room trying to minimize business disruptions.

"We were spending almost all of our time deploying servers and maintaining systems," De Roock recalls. "None of it was strategic, and we were constantly playing catch up with the business."

Continuing its penchant for change and progress, EXMAR transformed its data center infrastructure with Cisco HyperFlex, Cisco UCS, Cisco Intersight, and Cisco security solutions.

"We don't have to babysit the data center anymore. HyperFlex has been up and running for two years, and we've had zero downtime."

David De Roock

ICT Infrastructure Project Manager, EXMAR



Cost considerations: Hyperconverged versus public cloud

Adopting hyperconverged infrastructure wasn't the first choice for EXMAR. The company initially planned to put its applications and data in a public cloud, but cost realities quickly became a concern. As a global company, De Roock says EXMAR needs its workloads running 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

"The cloud was way too expensive," he claims. "We did a cost analysis, and putting our workloads into a public cloud is equivalent to buying one new HyperFlex system every year."

Cisco HyperFlex was also more cost effective than the other hyperconverged systems EXMAR evaluated.

"We didn't just look at the price tag on the hardware," De Roock says. "We also had to consider the cost of Windows, VMware, and Veeam licensing. Cisco helped us rightsize the configuration and reduce the number of nodes, which is saving us about \$10,000 every year in software licenses."

EXMAR's primary data center in Antwerp and disaster recovery facility in Brussels have identical Cisco HyperFlex clusters, with four nodes each. The two sites are connected with Cisco Nexus 9000 switches, providing automatic failover in the event of an outage. Cisco UCS is utilized as a backup server, and Cisco Umbrella, Cisco ISE, and Cisco Email Security provide network protection and access control. "We don't have to babysit the data center anymore," says De Roock. "HyperFlex has been up and running for two years, and we've had zero downtime."

Deploying new computing resources is also much easier—and faster. What used to take days now takes minutes.

"We can spin up a server in 30 to 45 seconds," De Roock boasts. "And with scripts automating connectivity and security, we can have an entire test and development environment up in six minutes or less, without any impact to our production systems."

Application performance has improved as well. The all-flash configuration, integrated network fabric, and data optimization features of Cisco HyperFlex have eliminated the latency problems of the past.

"We used to have up to 200 milliseconds of latency for certain operations," De Roock recalls, noting the impact on productivity when hundreds of users are all accessing the same application. "With the HyperFlex all flash nodes, we've never had more than five milliseconds of latency." "We did a cost analysis, and putting our workloads into a public cloud is equivalent to buying one new HyperFlex system every year."

David De Roock

ICT Infrastructure Project Manager, EXMAR



Looking ahead

No longer consumed with server deployments and systems maintenance, the EXMAR IT staff has turned its attention to strategic initiatives that help push the company forward.

"We're evaluating emerging technologies, adding additional layers of security, and finding new ways to support our users around the world," De Roock says. "We didn't have time to focus on those things in the past."

EXMAR plans to extend its data center infrastructure to regional branch offices using Cisco HyperFlex Edge and may do the same for its fleet of 40-plus seafaring vessels. All of the company's global infrastructure—from the data center core to the nautical edge—will be managed with Cisco Intersight.

"We're looking at deploying hyperconverged clusters in our remote locations using Cisco Intersight and Cisco HyperFlex Edge. The integration will allow us to streamline our IT operations and accelerate problem resolution," De Roock says. "We need as much security, resilience, and control in our ships and branch offices as we do in the data center. We're going with Cisco for the whole shebang."

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