

A blurred, blue-tinted photograph of an office environment, showing people moving and working at desks.

## case study

## BizzEnergy Ltd Gains Cost and Performance Advantages from Clustered Environments

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Ken Marchant, Chief Technology Officer,  
Bizz Energy.

The liberalisation of the UK electricity market and the falling price of wholesale electricity have opened a world of opportunity for new energy suppliers with innovative business modules. One such supplier, BizzEnergy Ltd, bases its winning business model on the smart use of technology a sophisticated pricing engine that provides instant online quotes to small and midsize businesses. Initially based on Oracle Express, the pricing engine has been upgraded to use Oracle9i Database with Real Application Clusters. The new technology has resulted in easier systems management and better use of existing server resource, saving BizzEnergy money on external IT consulting fees and paving the way for easier upgrades in the future.

Founded with venture capital backing in 2000, BizzEnergy's aim is to deliver low-cost electricity combined with outstanding customer service. It prides itself on being the only energy supplier in the UK that can provide and approve an online quote in less than five minutes, and the success of this approach is reflected in its £100m annual turnover. Behind the external web site is a complex pricing engine built by Oracle Certified Partner plus consultancy. The pricing engine analyses the customer's current electricity usage and calculates the best possible price, typically bringing the customer a 20% saving on annual electricity charges.

When Oracle announced plans to desupport the obsolescent Oracle Express product, on which the initial pricing engine was based, BizzEnergy saw it as an opportunity to bring the system up to date with the latest Oracle technology. It turned to **SolStonePlus** to conduct a full upgrade to Oracle9i Database with Real Application Clusters (Oracle9i RAC) and the Oracle9i OLAP Option, which has resulted in a number of clear benefits.

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**Ken Marchant**, Chief Technology Officer,  
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### Clustering Reduces System Downtime

BizzEnergy's billing, registration and financial accounting systems were all already based on Oracle9i. Deploying all four systems in a clustered environment using Oracle9i RAC means that they can automatically switch to backup servers (the company's test servers) if a piece of hardware goes down. "Clustering gives much more power and resilience to the live systems, which is crucial to us because if the pricing engine goes down, our business stops," said Ken Marchant, chief technology officer at BizzEnergy.

### More Flexible IT Infrastructure

By upgrading the pricing engine to Oracle9i in line with BizzEnergy's other systems, the company has created a more streamlined IT architecture that will make future additions and upgrades considerably easier. The Java development tools provided by Oracle9i Developer Suite also allow BizzEnergy much greater flexibility when designing new screens and applications for the pricing engine.

### Improved Security

"The upgrade has brought the pricing engine system in from the cold," said Marchant. "We can now apply security policies across all our Oracle-based systems, which reduces the risk of breaches and makes security policy much easier to administer."

### Easier Backup and Recovery

Disaster recovery processes have also been greatly simplified by the upgrade. "We have experienced hardware failures before, which resulted in very difficult and time-consuming recovery procedures," said Marchant. "Oracle9i provides much more simplified backup and recovery functionality, which will save us time and effort."

### Reduced Reliance on External Consultants

The new Oracle9i - based system provides reporting functionality through Oracle Discoverer, an easy-to-use business intelligence tool that BizzEnergy's internal IT team can use to query the database. Prior to Oracle9i, the company had to rely on the skills of SolStonePlus engineers to perform specific SQL queries. "Oracle9i makes us more self-sufficient, as well as saving money on consultancy fees," said Marchant.

### Why SolStonePlus?

BizzEnergy enjoys a long working relationship with SolStonePlus, dating back to before the foundation of the present company. "We knew that SolStonePlus could develop the kind of system that we wanted," said Marchant. "We plan to extend our use of Oracle technology in future to improve the performance and recovery capabilities still further."

### Why Oracle?

The company has chosen to standardise on Oracle as the database technology underpinning all its mission-critical systems. "Oracle's stated product direction reassured us that standardising on Oracle would provide Bizz Energy with a "least cost" security, recovery and growth capability that could not be matched by other databases." said Marchant. "We plan to extend performance and recovery capabilities still further."

### Implementation Process

The upgrade from Oracle Express to the Oracle9i environment was conducted over a four-month period to a project plan agreed in advance by BizzEnergy and SolStonePlus. The Oracle partner provided an end-to-end service including design, build, implementation and user training.

*BizzEnergy is an online electricity supplier founded in 2000 with venture capital backing from Atlas Ventures and Geneva Energy Ventures. Based in Worcester, England, it employs 88 staff and has annual revenues of approximately £100m. The company won the Midlands and East of England Region E-Business Strategy of the Year award for 2003, and was named Business of the Year in 2003, and was named Business of the Year in Commerce Business Festival Awards. More information about BizzEnergy is available from [www.bizzenergy.com](http://www.bizzenergy.com)*



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