

Neoria and Nutanix support Athena's growth

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Head of IT & Development
at Athena: "We need to
reinvent ourselves all the
time. Neoria and Nutanix
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that allows us to do so,
while maintaining the
performance and scalability
we need."



Traditional IT infrastructure had a hard time keeping up with Athena's rapid growth. Neoria – an Uptime Group company – offered Nutanix as a suitable solution for Athena's prepress business. A hyperconverged infrastructure environment delivers the performance, flexibility and scalability Athena was looking for.

Athena specializes in prepress services for the flexographic printing industry. The company works on the technical preparation and production of printing plates for flexographic printing. Athena has 93 employees, working in the company's headquarters in Roeselare (Belgium) and on sites in Veenendaal (The Netherlands) and Saint-Etienne (France). Flexographic printing is a graphic printing technique for which images or text are embossed on flexible rubber printing plates. The technique is quite commonly used in the packaging industry, among others. Athena's customers are flexographic printing companies that don't produce printing plates themselves, as well as international brands that prefer a full-service approach: from design and layout, including versioning in foreign languages, to ready-to-use printing plates. Athena's broad customer portfolio has as a consequence that the company needs to offer expertise for both the technical and marketing-related aspects of a project.

At Athena, every customer has a single point of contact. The account manager is responsible for the complete service delivery, again both technically and content-wise. Athena differentiates itself most through automation. The company streamlines its processes using specialized graphic software. On top of that solution, Athena built an online portal, allowing the customer to track orders, approve designs, compare versions of documents, and more. Straight from the customer's ERP platform, PDF files can be uploaded into Athena's systems, initiating a completely automated workflow, including the approval of proofs. Orders placed before 3 PM are completed the same day and delivered at the customer's site the next morning.

| In search of more performance

At Athena, the importance of IT speaks for itself. Head of IT & Development Alexander Degroote manages a team of 7 employees. "More than 10 years ago, we started working with virtualization, based on VMware technology", he said. "In 2013, we renewed the IT infrastructure, including servers, storage and switches." At the

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same time, Athena decided to go for more automation, by expanding the customer portal. But due to the portal's success, servers and storage soon reached the limits of their capabilities. As a result, Athena's systems faced problems with latency. "That's when we decided to focus on core IT only. Infrastructure is no longer part of that." Athena started the selection process for a partner that would offer a suitable solution, with the right performance and support.

"We were looking for a modular solution", Degroote continued, "that would offer the scalability we need to support our growth." Athena compared solutions from several suppliers and decided in favour of the combination of Nutanix's hyperconverged infrastructure and partner Neoria. Nutanix combines storage, compute and virtualization on one platform. "Neoria offered a solution that covers everything we had on our wish list. First and foremost, we wanted to solve the problems we had with our servers and storage. Apart from that, we were also looking for a way to improve the virtualization of our environment."

| One partner

Neoria built a next-generation data center for Athena: based on Nutanix's hyperconverged infrastructure and redundant network configuration. The infrastructure is completely cloud-ready, paving the way for Athena in the direction of a hybrid our public cloud. Neoria was in charge of the migration's meticulous preparation. The installation and migration were carried out in full transparency and without any downtime for Athena's end-users. "We now have a much more powerful IT environment", said Degroote. "As a user, you can really tell the difference in performance. There's no more latency – none at all. There's even no more latency during the calculation of colour printing proofs, which requires an enormous amount of computing power." And there's more than just performance. The company's IT team has an easier job managing the IT infrastructure. Management is carried out on a central console. "In the meantime, we also asked Neoria to look after our VMware environment. We now have one partner for the entire infrastructure. That's making life quite a bit easier."



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Thanks to the solution that Neoria implemented, Athena's employees work on a highly available environment. On top of



that, Nutanix offers a new level of flexibility. "When we need a new server, or we want a new service – tailored to the specific need of a customer – rolled out on the portal, we can do so really quickly. Before we worked with Nutanix, the first step in such a process would be ordering a new physical server." And there's more. Reliable snapshots and backups help guarantee Athena's business continuity. "The employees notice the difference in IT performance most in their day-to-day activities", Degroote explained. "Whenever a customer asks for a certain design in PDF format, the file is available right away. On the previous IT infrastructure, it could take up to 15 minutes to generate such a file." Meanwhile, figures prove that Neoria's solution is a real business booster. "Since the implementation, the company's turnover has grown significantly. But at the same time, this growth didn't have any impact on the infrastructure's performance." And what if Athena keeps evolving this rapidly? Degroote: "In that case, we will simply expand the Nutanix cluster. That's another advantage of the technology's modular design"