

IPsoft Case Study: Funcom

11 April 2008

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1 Executive Summary

IPsoft designed and implemented a hosting/colocation and fully managed services solution for Funcom, a major provider of Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOG), which gave Funcom the combination of system stability, rapid response to infrastructure issues, and cost-effectiveness that they needed to be successful.

1.1 Company Background

Funcom N.V. (<http://www.funcom.com>) is a world-leading independent developer and publisher of computer and console games with a focus on Action-Adventure and Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOG). Funcom's highly skilled employees work from offices in Switzerland, Norway, the USA and China.

Since 1993, Funcom has provided game-playing customers worldwide with outstanding entertainment, having released some 23 successful games to date. Recent successes include *Dreamfall*, the successful sequel to the multi-award-winning *The Longest Journey*; the award-winning and critically acclaimed *Anarchy Online - The Notum Wars*; and the blockbuster *Anarchy Online - Shadowlands*.

Funcom is currently developing three games internally, including *Anarchy Online - Lost Eden*; *Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures* and one unannounced MMOG project. When Funcom began to develop its infrastructure strategy for *Age of Conan*, it looked to IPsoft for a fully managed solution.

1.2 Business Need

In a Massively Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG), game publishers sell boxed software for personal computers and videogame consoles; players connect to the publisher's servers over the Internet in order to play the game and interact with other players from around the world.

The cost of developing a competitive commercial MMORPG title often exceeds ten million dollars. These projects require multiple disciplines within game design and development such as 3D modeling, 2D art, animation, user interfaces, client/server engineering, database architecture, and network infrastructure.

[...]

Developing an MMOG server requires expertise with client/server architecture, network protocols, security, and relational database design. MMORPGs include reliable systems for a number of vital tasks. The server must be able to handle and verify a large number of connections, prevent cheating, and apply changes (bug fixes or added content) to the game. A system for recording the game's data at regular intervals, without stopping the game, is also important.

Maintenance requires sufficient servers and bandwidth, and a dedicated support staff. Insufficient resources for maintenance lead to lag and frustration for the players, and can severely damage the reputation of a game, especially at launch. Care must also be taken to ensure that player population remains at an acceptable level by adding or removing servers ("shards").¹

Most MMOG publishers derive revenue not only from the initial sale of boxed games, but also from recurring subscription payments from the players who access their servers. Keeping customers happy by delivering a high-quality user experience is key to maintaining and growing recurring revenue streams.

Thus, for a MMOG provider, server uptime, availability, and performance are absolutely crucial:

- If its IT infrastructure isn't perfectly scalable, or cannot support the considerable database and storage I/O demands created when thousands and thousands of players are accessing their servers simultaneously, the company is unable to deliver the kind of compelling, immersive experience that player-customers demand.
- If users experience significant downtime or degraded performance, the company's not doing business, period.
- If there are problems or issues in the infrastructure, the company needs extremely fast response and resolution times.

Funcom had hosted its award-winning *Anarchy Online* game with Savvis for over four years. When it came time to contemplate the launch of their next major MMOG project, *Age of Conan*, Funcom executives rethought their strategy, starting with one basic question: do we want to establish a conventional hosting/co-location relationship, pursue a fully-managed solution, or devise some hybrid approach that combines aspects of the two approaches?

¹ Wikipedia contributors, "Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games", *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MMORPG> (accessed April 2, 2008).

Over a six-month period, Funcom evaluated more than 30 hosting companies and managed services providers, ranging from small, boutique operations to major multinational corporations, to determine which company could provide the right mix of services and support for its needs. Funcom also considered (and rejected) the idea of managing its own IT infrastructure.

1.3 IPsoft Solution

Funcom selected IPsoft as its managed service provider for the *Age of Conan* rollout.

IPsoft's solution for Funcom comprises:

- Data center hosting/co-location in North America and Europe (more than 500 servers in two Tier 4 data centers)
- Total management of Funcom's server and network infrastructure via IPsoft's proprietary IPcenter solution, a consolidated platform for IT Service Management that leverages automation and expert systems to deliver superior management results at a lower Total Cost of Ownership than typical managed services solutions.
- Guaranteed mean time to respond of 15 minutes or less to all Funcom issues. This is made possible by leveraging the power of IPsoft's autonomic expert systems, which remediate over half of all detected exceptions in managed environments worldwide without human intervention, and quickly escalate issues that cannot be automatically resolved to the appropriate senior engineering resources.
- Where human expertise is required, Funcom can draw upon IPsoft's worldwide network of highly skilled network and server engineers to ensure rapid remediation of faults.

1.4 Customer Response

Ole Schreiner, Funcom's Vice President for Operations, observed:

“IPsoft provided the best mix of services for us, at a price that represented real value, so we felt most comfortable choosing IPsoft for our complete managed solution. Although they were less expensive than many top-tier providers, they were actually not the lowest bidder; however, we felt that the IPsoft solution represented the best value for money. Funcom feels very well taken care of,

because IPsoft has the same sense of urgency about our business that we do. There is a very good fit between our corporate cultures, and the IPsoft relationship gives us access to key skills in infrastructure management that we don't have within our own company.”

Mr. Schreiner further stated, regarding IPsoft's proprietary service management and delivery toolset, IPcenter:

“[IPsoft's] monitoring and management system... is the best in the industry. They have everything you need in one place. You can push one link on the old dashboard and get what you want immediately. You can customize it and play around with it, and it is absolutely beautiful to monitor and manage your whole system.”

Finally, Mr. Schreiner observes that IPsoft “overall, provides superior-quality products and services,” “deserves a strong recommendation from me to other companies and friends,” and “will get serious consideration for future business opportunities with my company.”

About IPsoft

IPsoft (<http://www.ipsoft.com>) is a global, industry-leading managed services company offering a complete solution to enterprise customers for outsourcing global IT infrastructure operations.

- IPsoft employs unique autonomic engines that automatically remediate 56% (on average) of the exceptions in our world-wide client environments. This has a dramatic bearing on the availability of networks and devices under our management, while at the same time significantly reducing Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) for our customers.
- Our customers enjoy drastically reduced Mean Times To Resolve (MTTRs) for any exceptions in their monitored environment(s).
- Better availability and fewer unmanaged exceptions mean better experiences for our customers.
- In eight years of operational history, IPsoft has not lost a single client to another vendor, a track record that is unmatched by other comparable providers, and attests to the customer satisfaction that our clients experience.
- Today, one in every 25 Fortune 1000 companies uses IPsoft for its hosting and managed services needs.

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