

Mercator ensures data availability with B-Telecom



Frederik Borremans
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Working closely with B-Telecom, the Mercator insurance company has developed a dependable solution for ensuring that its critical data applications are available at all times. B-Telecom's dedicated optical fibre network handles the ultra-fast transmission of substantial data volumes in a fully redundant ICT configuration. Seldom has data been so easy to access. And seldom has a customer been so satisfied.

Until the 1990s, mountains of paper were a normal day-to-day feature of the insurance business. But Mercator has now successfully done away with these tons of paperwork. Managing its records online electronically has created greater efficiency for the company, both in terms of production (new policies and contracts) and for claims management. But automation also brought a number of new challenges with it. For example, Mercator first had to optimise the availability of its ICT systems and applications. Because a system that is not readily available to users can mean a considerable loss for an insurance company that operates with a network of 3 to 4000 independent brokers. Not being able to get in touch with Mercator makes for a very unhappy broker.

Good reasons

To boost its system availability, Mercator implemented a range of improvements:

- A **fully redundant ICT infrastructure**. All system and network components had to be developed with a second data centre in a different location.
- The **efficiency of data storage**. The data, database and applications have to be accessible at all times, regardless of what may be happening.
- The **disaster recovery plan (DRP)** and **business continuity plan (BCP)** must ensure that Mercator keeps its hands firmly on the tiller, even in unforeseen circumstances.
- The network in general must be **able to withstand even the most improbable events**, both in the Antwerp head office and externally (the extranet). The company needs to have smooth communication with its regional offices, brokers and business contacts in every situation.

Totally different approach

To ensure the redundancy of its systems, Mercator opted for a system integrator and LAN manager.

To handle the constant mirroring between the data centres and for data transmission in general, Mercator needed high data flow rates it could count on, come what may. There were plenty of telecommunication providers out there, of course, but they were all renting and leasing all sorts of capacity from other providers, which meant they had less control over actual availability. **The only provider that took a totally different approach was B-Telecom**, which came up with a range of customised solutions and telecommunication services based on a dedicated fibre optic network.

“B-Telecom provided us with what we really needed,” says Frederik Borremans, ICT Manager Operations at Mercator.

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“We could see that they knew exactly what they were doing. The technical teams at B-Telecom also became involved in the project from day one. No fine-sounding sales promises, just nitty-gritty facts. Once we had made up our minds, we were especially delighted with the flexibility that B-Telecom displayed during the project, on a day-to-day basis. The solution and schedule all ran very smoothly. And we always appreciated their open, very direct communication.”

Genuinely redundant

B-Telecom provides the following services between Mercator’s two data centres via two fibre optic links:

- a redundant 2 Gbps link between the SAN
- a redundant 1 Gbps link between the LAN
- a redundant Fast Ethernet (100 Mbps).

There is redundancy both for the lines (i.e. the physical cables) and for the routes, which are totally different. The physical entry points for the cables into the building are as far apart as possible and the telecom equipment is totally separate.

The critical data applications at insurance company Mercator are guaranteed at all times. B-Telecom’s dedicated fibre optic network ensures that huge volumes of data can be sent ultra-fast in a totally redundant ICT configuration. The scalability of the B-Telecom solution creates real confidence for the future.

For more information about the projects and/or solutions that B-Telecom can customise for your company or organisation, contact:

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Benefits

“What is particularly striking today is the scalability of the B-Telecom solution”, says Frederik Borremans. “In the insurance industry, huge volumes of data are commonplace. Yet we are now in a secure position for the future, including in terms of network availability, because with B-Telecom we have an SLA that is significantly better than what the competition has to offer!”

Mercator also appreciates the relationship of trust that was established between the two companies at an early stage: “Working with B-Telecom always runs smoothly. And they do not have to write everything down 100% on paper for it to continue that way!”

Finally, downtime in Mercator’s ICT infrastructure has been cut to minimum. This means that not only have risks been reduced substantially, but Mercator is also able to meet all of the requirements set by the Banking, Finance and Insurance Commission (CBFA) in terms of business continuity.

About MERCATOR

Mercator is a subsidiary of the Swiss company La Bâloise, which provides a wide range of insurance solutions for private individuals and SMEs. In addition to ‘non-life insurance’, such as personal liability, car, fire, liability, accident and occupational accident cover, Mercator also has a broad range of life products (branch 23 and branch 21 products).

Mercator sells its products through an extensive network of independent insurance brokers.

About B-TELECOM

B-Telecom is a business unit of Syntigo. As a subsidiary of SNCB Holding, Syntigo supplies high-quality telecommunication services to the media, hospitals, government departments, financial institutions, telecom carriers, industrial companies and many other organisations. The Belgian Railways’ tight-knit fibre optic network is capable of handling (very) high volumes of data and is accessible everywhere. It forms the foundation of B-Telecom’s services: a lightning-fast network, stable group structure and highly dependable technologies.