

favorit Ltd.

Web 2.0 Startup Counts on Sun to Bring Its RSS Feed Technology to the Masses



Customer Success Story

Industry

- Media and Entertainment

Business Issues

- Support new business that relies on server technology as its backbone
- Manage expected rapid data growth
- Keep power and cooling costs low

Solution

fav.or.it installed three Sun SPARC Enterprise® T5220 Servers running Sun's MySQL™ 5.0 Database and the Solaris® 10 Operating System.

Business Results

- Established scalable infrastructure for growth
- Anticipated 20% – 30% savings annually through energy efficiency
- Leveraged Sun programs to create a powerful, flexible, and scalable platform and to bring new products to market

Products/Services/Solutions

- Sun SPARC Enterprise T5220 Server
- MySQL Database
- Solaris 10 Operating System
- Sun Startup Essentials

URL Reference

sun.com/customers

favorit Ltd is a Web 2.0 startup company with impressive ambitions for its cutting-edge social-networking technology, fav.or.it, which it bills as the RSS reader for the masses. Founded in late 2007, the fast-growing company is based in London.

Success at a glance

Tipped to be the next big thing on the Web, social networking company fav.or.it had to make sure it's critical server technology didn't make it yesterday's news. Blogs have become extremely popular over the last few years, with various estimates putting the number of existing sites at more than 75 million. The company's fav.or.it software is a unique product that will not only allow Internet users to aggregate content from blogs like a newsreader (RSS readers or feeds, generally seen to stand for Really Simple Syndication) but also post comments, all without leaving the site. "We are bringing the blogging experience to a mass, worldwide Internet audience. Even my parents can use it," says favorit Founder and Chief Executive Officer Nick Halstead.

The social-networking market is potentially highly lucrative, and fav.or.it is aiming to take on the major players. Its model is to encourage unique visitors to the site to become registered repeat users and turn the resulting profile information, blog tags, and attention data into targeted marketing. The IT infrastructure of a small startup must be capable of handling the same amount of traffic as the biggest Web sites. And as social networking sites like Twitter have discovered the hard way, such popularity can be a double-edged sword: positive word of mouth and publicity may bring a flood of Internet traffic that can overwhelm a company's servers, causing crashes that risk alienating new users.

When the team of four first began developing the basic code for fav.or.it, they started with laptops straight out of the box and not much else. Soon Halstead needed to plan how fav.or.it could go from zero to hundreds of thousands of registered users in a matter of months, weeks, or even days. "Rather than launch straight into a public beta, in essence asking any and everyone to kick the tires, we went for a private beta," he says. "That allowed a small but increasing number of users access to the blogging platform as we proved the software and hardware platform." Thirty thousand users preregistered for the private beta.

In preparation for the private beta, Halstead also began searching for companies favorit could partner with to build and run a Web infrastructure from scratch. The CEO's preference for open-source technologies came in large part from working with the Solaris Operating System in the past. However, he was initially unsure about going to Sun. "My early perception of Sun was that it dealt with enterprises and enterprises only, not startups like us," Halstead says. "But we were swayed by the energy efficiency and associated cost savings Sun servers offered, and then by learning that Sun gave startups very good discounts and support." The Sun Startup Essentials™ program is designed specifically to help startups get off the ground rapidly and cost effectively.

The favorit shopping list included full-featured Web application and small-footprint database servers. Such high-performance

servers had to have four key abilities: reliability, availability, scalability and usability. Energy efficiency was also critical. “We have space for half a rack in our local facility, and for every 1 amp extra we use, it costs us an extra £150 a month,” Halstead says, “If you count that across a year, it suddenly means if the server is even half as efficient, it can save thousands of pounds. That was an easy bit of maths for us to look at.”

The favorit team were quickly up and running on three SPARC Enterprise T5220 Servers, running Sun's MySQL server solution, and the Solaris 10 Operating System. The entire set-up process took them only a week, even though they were migrating disparate software and systems. “We're running different bits of the site on different servers,” Halstead says. “The first T5220 running Apache is the biggest and is absolutely perfect for us because it's serving all of our Web traffic where we have hundreds of people hitting the server simultaneously. To then have all those threads on a call thread server makes a huge difference.” The MySQL open source database is running on the second server, while the third is handling all of the API requests from external sites that use the fav.or.it service.

MySQL is a multithreaded, multiuser SQL database management system that has proven to be well suited to favorit's needs. “MySQL came with the full package for us,”

Halstead says, “It is fully scalable, completely reliable, and we don't have to spend a lot of time maintaining it, plus there is no vendor lock-in and it eliminates proprietary database license fees. Perfect.”

According to Halstead, the software side of favorit's Sun system has helped to keep his worries to a minimum. One key example is the patch utility in the Solaris OS. “With SunSolve, we know that all of the patches come from a reliable source, and it makes a huge difference,” he says. “I know that with Sun, what we're getting is going to be secure and rock solid. We can do an update of any software and know it's not going to take our whole service down.” In addition, the Service Management Facility (SMF) in the Solaris OS makes managing essential services easier, with a simple XML dependency-based system for rules modification. Sun's Startup Essentials Program has also offered favorit crucial support. In one instance, favorit had an unusual and very technical problem with the library, and Sun's support team was able to fix the issue in a day—something Halstead estimates would have taken favorit two or three days to research and figure out.

The private beta release of favorit to 4,000 users came off without a hitch, garnering positive blog reviews and user feedback. “Everything was running smoothly from the outset on the servers; the traffic wasn't even touching the sides,” Halstead says. “I've no doubt that we can grow our business very,

“My early perception of Sun was that it dealt with enterprises and enterprises only, not startups like us. But we were swayed by the energy efficiency and associated cost savings Sun servers offered, and then by learning that Sun gave startups very good discounts and support through the Sun Startup Essentials program.”

Nick Halstead

Founder and CEO, favorit Ltd.

very quickly with what we've got.” But the real test came with the official launch of the fav.or.it site. The company's second round of funding depended on a successful launch of the site no later than June 10. It was unclear how many users the launch would draw, though earlier announcements by the company had attracted more than 200,000 hits. “We didn't know what to expect. But even if it were to have 100,000 unique hits in the first 24 hours, we knew our servers could handle it,” Halstead says. “The more traffic the better. With Sun's help, I am completely confident that we can handle anything.”