

Applied Relational Technology



Sun Ray™ Ultra-Thin Client Success Story

Key highlights

Company

Applied Relational Technology

Industry

- Retail

Products/Services

- Application development
- High-availability systems for business continuity
- Storage integration for information management
- Networks and cabling for business communication

Summary

- Large-scale deployment of Sun Ray™ 100 and Sun Ray 150 ultra-thin clients
- Sun Microsystems™ hardware at the core of a network, which vastly improves information flow in shopping centers
- System has performed extremely well since its implementation
- Can be managed remotely without problems
- Application partner now seeking new sales opportunities along with Sun in U.S. and Europe
- Real application using Java™ technology with a Netscape™ browser

“Having the Sun Ray clients in place may mean we are at the leading edge in terms of technology, but they are ideal for our customer needs. They make system management easier and reduce the cost of ownership.”

– Roger Jordan, Applied Relational Technology

Sun Microsystems’ Sun Ray™ 100 and Sun Ray 150 ultra-thin clients are being used in a new Solaris™ software-based IT system to provide information across a network in two of the UKs newest shopping centers.

Application and software developer Applied Relational Technology (ART) recently implemented new systems at WestQuay, Southampton and Livingston, Scotland. Both sites are based on Sun Enterprise™ servers and are designed to improve information flow between center managers, retailers, and customers. The systems use Sun Ray ultra-thin clients for ease of use and simplicity. ART chose Sun for reliability, scalability, value for money, and performance, and the company is delighted with the way the hardware is performing.

Traditionally, shopping malls appeared to be relatively simple in their design and construction. They consisted of individual shop units and one or more food courts and car parks. As far as the consumer was concerned, that’s usually about it. However, the new generation of shopping center destinations offers a completely new experience. They are full leisure experience, with restaurants, cinemas, day nurseries, live entertainment, and much more.

In reality, things are usually a good deal more complex behind the scenes. Shops need to communicate with each other, and to stay in touch with the center’s management for security alerts. Traffic flow — both human and vehicular — has to be monitored. These more progressive centers with turnover linked rents for each retail unit must log their performance for rental calculation purposes.

Until now, most of these functions have been undertaken through traditional methods, creating large amounts of paperwork. However, with the assistance of a central IT network, two of the UKs newest shopping destinations, WestQuay, Southampton, owned by Hammerson and Barclays, and the BAA McArthur Glen Designer Outlet at Livingston in West Lothian, are using Sun™ hardware, including the new Sun Ray 100 and Sun Ray 150 ultra-thin clients, as the core technology to deliver these services.

Applied Relational Technology of Canterbury was the application and software developer contracted to provide the software solution and in the case of Livingston, the Cisco Gigabit network infrastructure. “Our product is called Retail Advantage, and we market it as a package,

and as part of a full turnkey solution,” explains Roger Jordan, the company’s director.

“The system is used for functions such as alerts, messaging, retail sales reporting, and many more modules. It can also be linked into consumer touch-screen kiosks in the shopping center to provide detailed information such as local gift ideas, job opportunities, bus and train timetables, and center route planning for able and disabled people alike.”

Each shopping center uses a Sun Enterprise 420R server for the Retail Advantage application’s Oracle database and application server. A pair of Sun Enterprise 220R servers support 100 Sun Ray ultra-thin clients at each center. “We tried to make it as simple and easy to manage as possible,” says Jordan.

Sun hardware was chosen for the deployment of the software for a number of reasons. “ART wanted a stable, reliable and scalable hardware engine to support the Oracle database and application server. Sun fitted the bill on all these counts, Sun products are able to handle system growth without any problems, which is important to us, and its performance is excellent. I can honestly say that we haven’t had any trouble with them at all.”

“The Sun Ray ultra-thin clients,” Jordan says,” are an essential component of the system. They have no disk drive or onboard operating system, and are virtual devices that function across the local area network. One of the advantages we had with deployment of the system is that the retailers have no time to worry about the technology. The last thing they or

we wanted was the problem that PCs can have with failed disk drives and/or corrupted operating systems.”

“Having the Sun Ray clients in place may mean we are at the cutting edge in terms of technology, but they are ideal for the centers needs. They make system management easier and reduce the cost of ownership. We were convinced they were the right option — they stood out a mile.”

The system, which is based on the Solaris Operating System and makes considerable use of Java™ and Internet technology, provides a single integrated retail management environment. Each retailer has direct access to the Sun Ray ultra-thin client. The touch screen kiosks use Java applications to provide information to the centers customers and to access data from the Sun server.

Another advantage of the system is that it can be managed remotely from ART’s offices in Canterbury via the Web. “We can monitor both sites quite comfortably from here and work on the servers and even the Sun Ray clients remotely if we need to. The truth, though, is that we really don’t need to do very much. The hardware just sits there and goes on working.”

The new system brings a number of significant advantages. Managers, retailers, and customers are all provided with far better communications. This in turn leads to a more positive shopping experience, and enables the center owners and individual retailers to be more competitive and more responsive to customer needs.

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As far as ART is concerned, the deployment of Sun hardware has provided an ideal solution. The company wanted a complete platform solution from a single vendor and ownership of any problems from the end user through to the back end servers. With Sun, it has achieved this.

ART is now looking at the possibility of deploying Sun systems into the U.S. and Europe. “From my point of view, the main benefit of using Sun is the reliability of the hardware and their worldwide presence,” says Jordan. The Solaris OS has evolved over time and it is now a good, stable, and scalable operating system, and very easy to work with.

“You get what you pay for in life. You may pay a bit more for Sun products, but there is absolutely no doubt that at the end of the day, you get a quality product that isn’t liable to suddenly break down. We find customers adapted to Sun in just a matter of weeks and are only really interested the system delivering what they need to run their business.”

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