

COMback

Avocent Case Study

COMback GmbH

Secure remote management of diverse infrastructure

Business Needs

- Enable remote, out-of-band management of multiple disparate servers
- Preserve total separation of data center network from corporate network to ensure compliance with ISO 27001 for Information Security Management
- Reduce time and effort associated with managing servers

Business Benefits

- Avocent KVM over IP appliances enable out-of-band management for a diverse set of servers
- Avocent DSView 3 software provides a single, consistent interface for all server management
- Avocent ACS 6000 console servers manage servers, routers, switches, PBX telecommunications equipment and serial power devices
- The solution maintains separation of networks, an important element in ISO 27001 compliance
- Remote management saves time and effort

Overview

In 1993, the state government of Baden-Württemberg in Germany decided to find a new use for its old nuclear shelter. At that time, a number of major businesses in the area were considering how to improve their disaster-readiness, and the decision was made to allow a Stuttgart-based IT company to create a highly secure data center for disaster-recovery purposes. Following a year-long construction and refurbishment project, the data center—called CITA—opened for business, hosting IBM mainframes.

In 2000, the project was spun off into an independent company: COMback GmbH, based in Oberreichenbach. Today, COMback has highly skilled staff dedicated to providing technically stable and economically viable disaster recovery solutions to its customers in the financial, public and industrial vertical.

To minimize complexity and reduce administrative effort, COMback wanted a single tool to manage its estate of approximately 200 servers—a mixture of mainframes, IBM power-based machines and Intel-architecture servers.

“We selected Avocent KVM over IP and serial devices and DSView 3 management software as the best solution for our needs,” says Andreas Kessen, CTO, COMback GmbH. “With the Avocent solution, we have excellent flexibility and ease of management, with full multi-client capabilities and security through out-of-band management.”

Profile

Company

COMback GmbH

Location

Germany

Industry

Computer Services

Web site

www.comback.com

Solution

Avocent DSView® 3

management software

Avocent DSR® KVM over IP switch

Avocent ACS 6000 advanced console server

“The Avocent technology enables us to achieve two vital goals: out-of-band management of servers and the physical separation of the control room from the data center. These are both important in maintaining our compliance with ISO 27001 for Information Security Management from the Federal Office for Information Security.”

Andreas Kessen

CTO

COMback GmbH

Secure and convenient

With its roots in managing secure shared environments on the mainframe platform, COMback has considerable expertise in server virtualization, which it has now extended across the IBM power architecture and Intel-architecture servers. COMback sees the virtualization and abstraction of the physical infrastructure as key enablers for more flexible data center operations, and this belief informed its choice of server management solution.

“Before we selected the Avocent technology, we simply had direct connections over copper, and these were problematic because our need to keep the data center and the control room physically separate meant that we were at the limit of the connection range,” says Kessen. “The DSR and ACS solutions from Avocent enable us to connect over IP to the various types of hardware in the recovery center [DSR] and to manage multiple operating systems: Microsoft Windows®, Linux®, NetWare®, AIX and HP-UX [ACS].”

“With the Avocent solution, we have a single, central management tool for remote access, keeping complexity and administrative effort to a minimum,” says Kessen.

Rather than needing to run multiple, vendor-specific management devices, COMback uses the Avocent KVM over IP devices and DSView 3 software to create a secure, simplified, standardized management environment. Having started with a DS1800 switch in 2003, COMback now has a DSR 8035 switch with 32 ports and several other Avocent appliances implemented in the intervening years.

“The Avocent technology enables us to achieve two vital goals: out-of-band management of servers and the physical separation of the control room from the data center,” says Kessen. “These are both important in maintaining our compliance with ISO 27001 for Information Security Management from the Bundesamt für Sicherheit in der Informationstechnik (BSI) or the Federal Office for Information Security.”

Powerful and easy

Using the DSView 3 software, COMback is able to give its clients full control over their disaster-recovery infrastructure from within its client suite, which is a comfortable office located a short distance from the bunker containing the infrastructure itself.

“DSView 3 [software] is powerful yet easy to use,” comments Kessen. “It provides a consistent and convenient interface for our clients when they are using our recovery center. The DSView 3 software runs on both Windows and Linux, which is important for our clients, and it ensures complete security by ensuring that users can only access their own servers.”

For security reasons, COMback normally provides access from its own site, although the Avocent appliances can also provide secure access via VPN connections from anywhere in the world. During data recovery—whether for a test or in a genuine disaster scenario—clients will usually need to physically access their hardware for a short period of time to start the install or restore processes. Access to the data center takes place under strict supervision for security reasons. Clients then go to the client suite, where they use DSView 3 software to complete the recovery process via the Avocent KVM over IP appliances.

COMback also uses the Avocent technology to manage customer mirroring equipment, enabling data to be replicated without physically coupling the two networks. COMback can check the status of mirroring without having any access to the data itself, which is an important benefit for clients.

Saving time and ensuring security

The key benefit of the Avocent solution is that it provides flexible, secure and easy remote management of multiple types of servers. The out-of-band management capability minimizes the need for COMback employees and clients to physically enter the secure data center, saving time and maintaining ISO 27001 compliance.

“The Avocent solution saves a significant amount of time and effort by eliminating the need to walk hundreds of meters and pass through numerous security barriers every time we need to power cycle a server,” says Kessen. “In fact, based on our positive experience in managing the disaster-recovery center, we also deployed Avocent KVM over IP appliances to manage the COMback corporate infrastructure, which is completely separate. When managing our own servers, we can log in from home and perform a number of tasks remotely; it's highly convenient.”

He concludes, “From the point of view of our customers, perhaps the most significant benefit of the Avocent technologies is that they enable server management and maintenance even while maintaining complete separation of the networks at Layers 1 and 2. This strict separation of the networks helps us to ensure a world-class disaster-recovery option that meets our customers' requirements for data security.”

About Avocent Corporation

Avocent delivers IT infrastructure management solutions that reduce operating costs, simplify management and increase the availability of critical IT environments 24/7 via integrated, centralized in-band and out-of-band hardware and software. Additional information is available at www.avocent.com.