EXPRESSCLUSTER
Plaza Create Co., Ltd.

Customer

- Plaza Create Co., Ltd.

Industry

- Retail

Challenges

- Fluctuation in business with tremendous increase during the New Year period
- System delays or stoppages directly affect company revenue

Solution

- High-availability clustering software EXPRESSCLUSTER for failure backup
- Top market share in Japan and outstandingly strong operational support system

Results

- No more system delays and stoppages
- Fast and secure service even during the peak business period
- Reduced staff workload and stress

Introduction

With more than 1,000 photo shops operating nationwide and a recently launched online digital printing service, Plaza Create Co., Ltd. has established its position as Japan's number one photo finishing company. The busiest time of year for the chain is during the New Year period when Japanese people send an extraordinary number of New Year's greeting cards, each with a unique design or family photograph. Looking to overcome system bottlenecks at this busy time, Plaza Create was determined to enhance its system and database, and selected NEC as its partner. NEC deployed its high-availability clustering software EXPRESSCLUSTER (known as CLUSTERPRO in Japan) as the backend system, which combined with MySQL, Plaza Create's existing database, created a robust system that eliminated stoppages and delays, allowing Plaza Create to provide fast, trouble-free printing and finishing services during its peak business period.

Challenges

Founded on the philosophy of providing "joy that spreads from a single photograph", Plaza Create has built up its business to reach the top of the industry, operating a nationwide chain of more than 1,000 stores under the trade names Palette Plaza and 55 Station, and also providing an online printing service capable of receiving orders 24 hours a day. The company uses the open-source database MySQL to manage customer data from both the photo finishing stores and the online printing service.

The bulk of orders are received in the New Year period and orders have been increasing steadily year by year. With system stoppages or delays during this very busy period out of the question, Plaza Create decided to build a robust system and reorganize its database to allow the company to provide a service that was both secure and fast.

"If the system failed at New Year, we would face a serious loss of revenue," explains System Headquarters, General Manager, Ryuichi Ishikawa. "The normal operation of the system is linked directly with our bottom line. Looking ahead to projected increases in business, it was clear that we needed to enhance our system."

Plaza Create Co., Ltd.

Solution

Plaza Create decided to investigate installing clustering software that would increase availability and eliminate system stoppages and delays. The company selected EXPRESSCLUSTER from NEC, which holds the top market share in Japan and has an outstandingly strong operational support system.*

"We wanted clustering software so that we could achieve the kind of system robustness we needed during our peak business period," says Norito Kobayashi from System Operations Dept. "There's lots of clustering software out there, but what we needed was a partner who could provide comprehensive support after the system was up and running—someone we felt we could contact any time with any kind of question. NEC was chosen not only because of their high reliability evident in their track-record, but also because NEC offered the full-scale post-installation operational support we needed."

He also noted that EXPRESSCLUSTER was the only clustering software that officially supported products from Smart Style, the solution company that provided the MySQL database being used by Plaza Create.

Plaza Create handles considerably more orders at New Year than at other times of the year, which has led to system delays.

"System delays at New Year have resulted in complaints from customers that they cannot access our system," says Kobayashi. "To improve customer satisfaction, we realized that we needed to speed up our operations as well as reorganize our database."

Plaza Create therefore elected to employ the MySQL performance tuning service provided by Smart Style at the same time as installing NEC's EXPRESSCLUSTER, enabling them to create a robust system that achieved all their initial goals.

*Japan System Software 2010-2014 Forecast and 2009 Analysis (J10450103) -IDC Japan

Results

Plaza Create ran a real-load test as soon as the software was installed and the system was up and running.

"Using a testing tool, we ran a large-scale load test by getting staff at all 1,000 stores to send in orders from the shop floor and online simultaneously," recalls Ishikawa. "The results were excellent. The system did not crash and there weren't any delays. I realized that we had the robust system that we needed, and that I could look forward to the peak business period with a lighter heart, free from the worry of system failure."

"It was very reassuring that the software could handle any contingency," adds Hiroyuki Moteki, System Operations Dept. "It was also easy to ask questions about the system using the Web UI and exchange files and so on. NEC's support was very good."

Osamu Koike, Manager of System Operations Dept, looks ahead:

"We are also interested in expanding our sales systems as well as developing new services for our shops such as those related to digital cameras and cell phones. We're sure NEC will be able to help us here too."

Kobayashi adds:

"With the volume of data we handle from both the stores and the online service expected to increase, we'll also be asking NEC for ideas about storage and cloud solutions."

NEC provides not only software but also a variety of IT and network solutions, and is particularly strong in cloud computing.
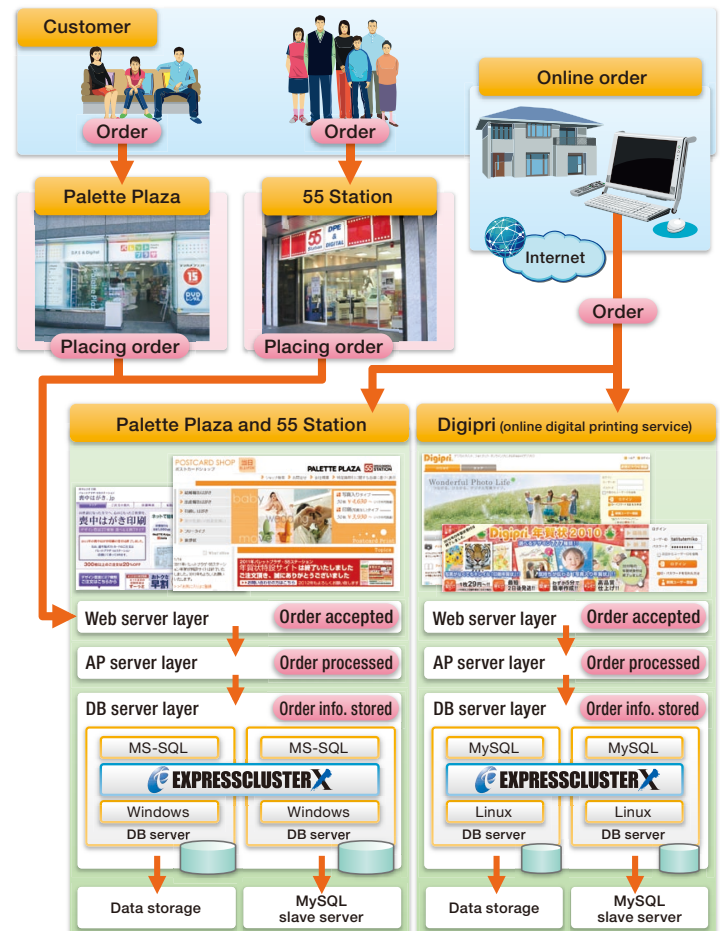
About

Plaza Create Co., Ltd. is a large-scale photograph finishing company with over 1,000 stores nationwide operating under the trade names Palette Plaza and 55 Station. The stores offer photograph finishing as well as New Year's card creation and a range of other postcard printing services. The company also operates the well-known online printing service Digipri (digital print).