"Good Question" for European Online Community: How Do You Successfully Serve 50 Million People?

"For us it was the perfect and right decision to invest in two Schooner-powered servers to replace fifteen legacy servers and produce a huge improvement in data access, scalability and our user experience. Performance is crucial to build our reputation and our revenues. Schooner has worked closely with us to make a big difference where it really counts. This was perfect Harmonische Zusammenarbeit!" (harmonious cooperation)

—Ulrich Nitsche
Chief Technology Officer, Gutefrage.net

50 Million Users Strong

Founded in July 2006, Gutefrage.net (part of the Georg von Holtzbrinck GmbH publishing group) is one of Central Europe's largest online question and answer communities. More than 50 million users per month freely exchange advice, tips, information and individual experiences about music, travel, healthy eating and thousands of other topics about daily life in general.

According to Amazon's Alexa Web Information Service, Gutefrage.net is the twenty-first most visited web site in Germany, extremely popular in Austria and Switzerland, and one of the top 500 sites in the world in terms of daily visitor traffic.

Translated into English, Gutefrage means "Good Question," and that's what the company's engineering team set out to answer when they searched for a technology solution that would cost effectively solve the scalability challenges of the site's exploding volume of user data that had quadrupled in a year to many hundreds of terabytes.

> "Schooner-powered servers are able to process a lot of traffic and handle millions of complex queries that would bring down less powerful systems."

Turning Complexity into Simplicity

"We are now serving about 95 million page impressions per month to millions of site visitors, some of whom consume entire evenings, as many as four to six hours, posting unique questions and answers and socializing with others. This deep level of engagement can be a big challenge to support, because each user wants our system to respond with very fast page loads," explained Ulrich Nitsche, Chief Technology Officer for Gutefrage.net. "Online community members can be very impatient. If our served pages are not fast enough, we will lose users, and lost users mean lost revenue in our online advertising-based business model."

In the past, MySQL running on 15 dedicated application servers powered Gutefrage's massive database. The sheer volume of data and increasing popularity of the site presented a variety of difficult performance, maintenance and system administration problems.

"We were having a hard time making those 15 servers replicate and operate efficiently. We invested a huge amount of time and effort into resolving these issues, and this was consuming far too many of our limited technical resources," Nitsche said.

During a 2009 discussion with a colleague, Nitsche heard about the breakthrough MySQL high-availability database solutions from Schooner Information Technology.

"We conducted some performance and reliability tests and quickly realized we could replace our 15 application servers with two commodity servers running Schooner MySQL Enterprise and vastly improve our performance," he added. "As a result of continued growth since that time, we have added another Schooner-powered server, and now have one master and two slaves running Schooner MySQL in production. This configuration continues to be much easier to operate and maintain than the 15 legacy servers. Simplicity is always good and our move to Schooner's technology was the perfect business decision for us."

Nitsche's obvious satisfaction stems from Schooner's ability to deliver extraordinary availability and performance by fully exploiting the capabilities of modern commodity

hardware: multi-core x86 servers, flash memory, and high-performance interconnects.

"Schooner has enabled us to make huge improvements in performance and achieve a great reduction in the time we have to spend working on maintenance solutions and all kinds of annoying, inefficient tasks."

Handsome Return on Investment

Schooner's highly scalable, available and reliable technology has helped Gutefrage turn a crucial corner in its startup growth curve.

"It happens frequently that new data-driven companies like ours reach a growth plateau because they can't develop the right technical solutions that scale adequately. I'm very confident that we've done the right thing by investing in Schooner's technologies to solve these technical challenges," Nitsche offered.

For Gutefrage, Schooner's ability to exploit and optimize modern x86 multi-core processor technology has resulted in higher user satisfaction levels, greater loyalty and faster user-base growth that in turn generate revenue growth. Additional positive return on investment can be attributed to Schooner's contribution to reduced capital expenses and lower power consumption, rack space requirements and network infrastructure costs. Gutefrage also saved time and expenses due to the speed and simplicity of the Schooner deployment.

"It took us less than a day to configure and implement the Schooner software on our systems. We had seriously considered developing our own custom solutions, but when we evaluated how much work and specialized MySQL knowledge that would require, we decided we could save time, sweat and money by leveraging Schooner's world-class technology," he reported.

> "Setup is fast and easy and the support from Schooner is fantastisch!"

Additional Human Factor Dividends

"For me personally, before we switched to Schooner, I spent many long evenings pouring over our system monitoring tools, checking to see if everything was working as it should, wanting to make sure that our users were getting the best query results and having the best possible online experiences. I wanted to make sure that there were not any system performance issues that could potentially stall the growth of our community. For me, this was a horrible, anxious, stressful time," Nitsche shared candidly.

Members of the Gutefrage management team now share in the confidence that they have implemented a best-of-breed solution to achieve comprehensive data reliability and service availability

> "Schooner allows us to scale our infrastructure in response to our rapid growth while achieving even higher performance and providing additional failover insurance."

enhanced by a rich set of high availability and disaster recovery capabilities including RAID, replication, backup and restore.

"It is another life for me now. I don't wake up at night. It took us a year to find the right solution, and the right answer to that big question is now so clear. The Schooner solution is the answer to my dreams and the end to my nightmares," said Nitsche.

Schooner Benefits to Gutefrage.net

- Superb performance, high scalability, extreme availability and fast access to terabyte-scale data
- Eight-to-one MySQL server consolidation, substantial reduction in database administration and IT labor costs, significant increase in database query performance
- Rapid company growth and logarithmic user base expansion made possible by greatly increased capacity for query processing and faster page loads, resulting in major improvements in the overall user experience
- Complexity replaced with simplicity, eliminating the need for inefficient horizontal database partitioning across multiple master systems
- Improved human factors, including a reduction in stress and anxiety for the technical people who previously worried about server performance and the quality of service being delivered to users
- Significant reduction in system power consumption, rack space requirements and network infrastructure costs
- Fifteen legacy servers freed for redeployment to other areas of the company to perform other important project work

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