

The need for speed

Scott Hanson of Ardentia explains how investing in IT infrastructure is the key to maintaining a speedy and highly functional egaming website



Scott Hanson is technical director and co-founder of Ardentia Limited with more than 15 years' experience in designing and implementing technical computer systems.

AS THE WORLD OF online gaming becomes increasingly mainstream, expectations of functionality of egaming websites – and the way in which these contribute to the overall online experience – are far higher than was previously the case. Today, most online users simply don't have the patience to wait for a slow or non-responsive site and nowhere is this more pertinent than in the increasingly crowded online gaming industry.

"In a market such as egaming, which has become increasingly competitive, the importance of issues such as speed of response and reliability simply cannot be underestimated," asserts Scott Hanson, director of egaming IT infrastructure specialist Ardentia. "Today, if someone is on a sports-betting website, for example, and it is experiencing technical issues, running slowly or has gone down altogether, there is a huge choice of alternative sites they can visit, as well as a strong chance that the customer might never return to the original site."

It is for this reason that Hanson believes that a strong

investment into IT infrastructure is a vital part of any successful egaming company. "Spending money on solid infrastructure and a strong team – internal or external – is crucial," he affirms. "I've seen a number of companies who have tried to cut back in this area because they have failed to recognise its importance but ultimately, these companies have ended up putting themselves at a huge competitive disadvantage. There are just so many good, clever operators out there getting it right, so the consequences of an inadequate IT infrastructure are potentially enormous in terms of both loss of reputation and loss of revenue."

Infrastructure or application?

In understanding the need to optimise IT infrastructure, Hanson believes that it is important to make clear the distinction between infrastructure and an application.

"An application is essentially the screens that the customer sees and the logic behind them – it is the software that does whatever specific thing the user expects the software to do, for example, online gaming," he explains. "In comparison, the infrastructure consists of the computers, the servers, the networking and so forth, as well as the system's operating software, and much of it can be common to all systems, giving the opportunity to share costs between the various applications deployed."

Making such a distinction has benefited Ardentia from both a technical and a commercial standpoint, says Hanson. "Infrastructure is often common to many applications and so a customer who, for example, might use one product for sports betting and a different one for its games will need infrastructure to run both of these application softwares – however, they will not necessarily want to buy a completely separate set for each application," he explains. "Accordingly, on the technical side, there are vast economies of scale to be had by looking

strategically at all the applications that are to be run, and developing the best performing, most reliable, lowest TCO infrastructure of all of these."

Preparing for disaster

In an effort to mitigate against situations such as a dramatic loss or a total loss of availability, effective planning is key. This is a primary area in which a company such as Ardentia will endeavour to offer advice on how to guard against exponent failure. "Say, for example, that one of our customers is running their 24x7 sportsbook two hours before a major sporting event when suddenly a component on the database server, say a cooling fan, blows up and puts the server out of action," Hanson explains. "By careful planning, dependence upon a 'single point of failure' can ensure that there is full redundancy and that there is no risk of the website going down just because a single component has failed."

Another failure that may occur, and one that, unlike the above example, is largely out of Ardentia's control is geographical "disaster", as Hanson explains: "An example of this might be a customer who is running a gaming site in Gibraltar, and has to cope with a general problem with telecommunications in the whole area," he says. "While the failure itself is not something we can influence ourselves, what we can do to help the customer assess – from a financial and business point of view – what the consequence of this situation might be, devise a budget of what they are prepared to spend to mitigate against it, and then, if it's important enough to the customer, replicate infrastructure in a different location that would allow the site to be seamlessly switched over without disruption to the customer."

As experts in egaming IT infrastructure delivering high availability, high performance, resilient systems that are compliant, one of Ardentia's key strengths is that the company is very technically-led, and runs gaming systems on an outsourced basis for many customers in the sector. "Not only do we have a strong services arm, but we are also using the same solutions that we are offering to our customers within our own and our customers' everyday operations," he explains. "As such, we are fully aware of the relative pros, cons and idiosyncracies of such solutions, because we have learnt about them all ourselves through experience."

"On top of this, we have a lot of experience in a number of different countries, and while for a business such as ours, trading internationally has been quite a steep learning curve, the lessons that we have subsequently learnt have been invaluable to us and led to us putting process in place that make Ardentia a very strong proposition," he adds.

Opportunities on the horizon

Looking forward, Hanson believes that the North American market holds great potential for future expansion, despite current restrictions on online gaming activity in the region. "The offering of egaming facilities to US citi-

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zens remains illegal so clearly operators must ensure that we are working within legal guidelines, but the Republican government whose ideology precipitated the ban is now gone. Other parts of North America are looking very seriously at liberalising their regulatory regimes and so this is an area that we plan to be involved with, as and when the regulatory environment changes," he states.

Keeping abreast of new developments and innovations in technology is another key area that Ardentia will continue to focus on going forward, says Hanson. "We have recently partnered with a company which offers very fast networking, and through looking at and implementing new technology, we aim to provide a faster user experience," he explains. "The typical gaming individual does a lot of searching before they make a purchase or bet selection, and so forth, and so you want to make sure that this process is extremely fast because, as we are all aware, there is nothing worse than a sluggish site that takes an age to refresh or load."

"That said, generally speaking, customers are less interested in technology than Ardentia is," he continues. "As such, when we are looking at new opportunities for innovation, we ensure that we are constantly focusing on what the customer really cares about – not how the technology works or what it's called, but rather, that it provides business advantage though an enhanced user experience."

WHAT THE CUSTOMERS ARE SAYING

"Leading egaming solutions are only as good as the infrastructure on which they are built. In Ardentia we found a partner who clearly understands this and bring us knowledge of wider infrastructure concerns in the egaming sector. In addition, Ardentia's technical expertise has recently helped us make significant savings in the areas of hardware memory and software licensing. I would have no hesitation in recommending them as a value-added partner."
Rob McDonald, CTO, Blue Square

"Effective data management is a growing issue for businesses today. We consider the outsourcing of our data requirements to experts to be a strategic necessity for our business, which runs on highly available data. For this reason we have partnered with Ardentia, calling on their specialist skills and experience, along with 24x7 support all year round."
Shane Paterson, Centrebet

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