

Essent.be

Service at the speed of light



Essent.be has grown its customer base fivefold over the past five years. As a challenger on the energy market, it knows it has to offer its customers exceptional service. That places high demands on its ICT infrastructure: all systems and data for contract processing and customer service must be optimally available. Two synchronously operating data centers linked by a fast fiber-optic connection presented the energy supplier with the ideal, cost-effective solution.

The challenge

Service helps create distinctive profile

The Belgian energy market is highly active. Since it was liberalised in 2002, several new suppliers have entered the market and begun to challenge the dominant company for many years. Essent.be is one of those challengers. It supplies gas and electricity to households and businesses. "We position ourselves as

an affordable and sustainable as well as reliable energy supplier. That is quite a mouthful, but we firmly believe that this combination offers most benefit to our customers," says Koen Rousseau, IT Manager at essent.be.

Rapid growth drives investment in infrastructure

Essent.be has seen an exponential growth in its

customer base in recent years, from 70,000 customers five years ago to more than 350,000 last year. In order to ensure continued good service, the company needed to invest in its ICT environment. Says Rousseau, "Your ICT environment must evolve continually with your business and your customers. There is a great difference between an environment serving several tens of thousands of customers and an environment serving hundreds of thousands. The ability to deliver responsive, fast performance and high availability then becomes increasingly important. There comes a time when it is no longer enough just to add some new hardware. You need to have the courage to re-evaluate your entire IT landscape, everything from your processes through your applications to your infrastructure."

Minimising the risk of downtime

A key consideration in upgrading the infrastructure was the need to minimise the risk of our business systems failing. Rousseau explains, "In the old situation all the systems ran locally at our head office, which at that time was situated in Antwerp. From there, expensive leased lines connected us to all our partners and call centres. This set-up had several major drawbacks. All the hardware, for example, was located in one place, a server room hastily built in what was originally an underground car park that was as watertight as a sponge. In addition, the high cost of the leased lines meant we had to economise heavily on bandwidth, with the result that on good days our call agents sounded like Darth Vader and on bad ones like R2D2."

The solution

Two synchronised data centers

Essent had a clear vision of its ideal new ICT infrastructure. Says Rousseau, "We wanted our new infrastructure to be configured for redundancy, with all the systems running synchronously in a data center at our new head office in Kontich as well as in a data center in Brussels. The substandard communication network also needed a complete makeover. The big challenge was how to align such high demands with a low capital outlay."

Affordable fiber-optic connection the missing piece in the puzzle

Rousseau had difficulty finding an immediate solution. "Our telecom provider at the time could only provide a connection of a maximum 100 Mb/s, and at such high cost that I feared having to shelve my plans for an ideal ICT infrastructure entirely. The other traditional telecom operators also were unable to offer a solution," he explains. The service provider of the online platform 'My Essent' recommended that essent.be contact Eurofiber, a provider of fiber-optic connections that was already well-established in the Netherlands, but which is still relatively unknown in Belgium. Says Rousseau, "The pieces of the puzzle fell neatly into place after just one meeting. Eurofiber was able to deliver a redundant 2 Gb/s high-speed connection between Kontich and Brussels, at a highly affordable price. And its partners could additionally provide us with the necessary services for disaster recovery and internet access."

"The costs of the connection are negligible compared with the expense of being offline for an extended period."

Koen Rousseau

IT Manager

Essent.be

The benefits

Super-fast, ultra-reliable connection

Eurofiber installed a super-fast, dependable connection for essent.be within just a few months, including the time needed for permit applications and digging work. "We now have a reliable connection with extremely low delay and fast response times. That reliability is enhanced considerably by the dual configuration of the connection, with two physically

separate 1 Gb/s fiber-optic routes. Eurofiber additionally guarantees to minimise downtime by ensuring each route is fully operational again within no more than four hours of an outage."

Negligible costs

In the event of a systems failure in the external data center in Brussels, the connection ensures that essent.be can quickly continue working from Kontich. "The costs of the connection are negligible compared with the expense of being offline for an extended period. And the new configuration does more than just minimise the risk of costly downtime. It also enables us to connect locally with all the leading telecom operators in the external data center. This wide choice of operators allows us to negotiate on favourable terms. We can purchase services from the party offering the best price-performance ratio, instead of being tied to the standard, monolithic solutions offered by the traditional telecom operators," says Rousseau.

Taking the lead with innovative applications

The connection also enables essent.be to take the lead in embracing innovative applications. "We can work from home, video conference, remotely follow presentations, and much more. We are also ready for new developments and pilot projects. For smart energy meters, for example, which can generate a tidal wave of data. Should it become necessary in the future, we can scale up our bandwidth quickly and affordably," explains Rousseau.

The case Essent.be

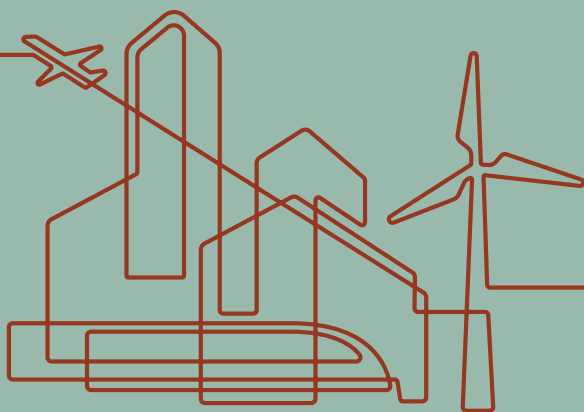
- Plentiful bandwidth at low cost
- Excellent reliability and response times
- Malfunctions guaranteed to be resolved
- within two hours
- Risk of systems outage minimised
- Ready for innovative applications

Reliable fiber-optic connection helps guarantee high service levels.



Curious to hear more about what we could achieve for your organization?

Eurofiber has been a fast-growing international provider of industry-leading digital infrastructure since 2000. Relying on our own fiber optic network and data centers, we provide smart, future-proof solutions for companies, government bodies and non-profit organizations. Customers have complete freedom to choose the services, applications and providers they need, allowing them to tap into the full potential of digital innovation. Eurofiber has an extensive fiber optic network in the Netherlands and Belgium, it unlocks its four data centers of its own and almost all public data centers in the Benelux.



Eurofiber. Lifeline for the digital society

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