

Asia Pacific | New Zealand | Manufacturing

No Spilt Milk! Westland Milk Products' ERP Application Keeps Production Flowing



Challenge

- sustained, active production line, else serious consequences for milk production
- needed a robust backup and disaster recovery solution for new ERP application

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Solution

- a Managed Cloud Platform (MCP) for backup and recovery
- constant and consistent data backups
- mission-critical applications can be quickly restored without impacting on production

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Result

- a robust, reliable disaster recovery platform for mission-critical applications
- guaranteed uptime assures ongoing production
- lower costs due to the pay-per-use model
- cost savings on rack space, power, infrastructure maintenance

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'Westland Milk Products are **based on the West Coast of the South Island**, which is quite remote, but the **cloud is connecting us to our global markets to be an international player.**'

Alistair Cree, IT Manager at Westland.

 Challenge

Lead by innovation

Westland Milk Products is New Zealand's third largest exporter of dairy products and supplies some of the world's top global food brands. Approximately 400 dairy farmers on the West Coast and Canterbury regions of New Zealand are shareholders in, and suppliers to this independent co-operative. Around 85% of its products are destined for international markets. Westland produces a range of products including dairy ingredient milk powders and proteins and cream products, as well as consumer brands. It's also developed a range of dairy-based nutritional powders to meet the increased global demand for infant nutritional products. Westland Milk prides itself on innovation, and on the value-add products developed by its respected research and development team.

Growth, increased demand, traceability

To cater for the increase in demand for milk-based products, particularly for the export market, Westland invested in a new processing plant in 2012 and, in November that year, built a new ERP application for production using the Microsoft® Dynamix AX platform. The application is vital to all aspects of production, including the important factor of traceability.

There's an increasing global demand for food traceability – that is, being able to show consumers where their food has come from and how it's produced. In addition to food safety, traceability is also an important marketing tool as it strengthens the credibility of exported food products. Westland's new ERP application allows the company to link all products back to the area in which the raw milk product was sourced.

It's vital that Westland's production continues as scheduled. The plant has limited storage capacity for excess milk, so the risks of stopping production for any length of time are high and it can affect the entire production line right back to the farmers. As Denis Wells, Operations Manager at Dimension Data, jokes: 'You can't turn off a cow!' Therefore, the new application needed to be backed up, with a robust disaster recovery solution in place.

Westland set two recovery targets for its production application in the event of a disaster: a return-point objective of 15 minutes (that is, losing a maximum of 15 minutes' worth of data); and a return-to-operation time of two hours (users must be able to log on to a functioning system within two hours of cutting over).

Disaster recovery testing was scheduled for the same weekend as the plant's annual maintenance. As Alistair Cree, IT Manager at Westland, explains, 'The main computer room is in the same location as the plant, which is powered down once a year for maintenance. Everything is shut down at the same time, presenting the perfect opportunity for disaster recovery testing.'

With a few months to prepare for the testing, Westland considered its options. Dimension Data had performed a full infrastructure refresh for the organisation three years prior, and had repurposed its original infrastructure in a disaster recovery location in Christchurch. However, there were concerns that the infrastructure was 'beyond its sell-by date'. Westland would need to invest significantly in maintaining the ageing infrastructure. New infrastructure would also be costly.

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 Solution

Disaster recovery in the cloud

Westland approached Dimension Data regarding possible disaster recovery solutions. Working with Westland's business and IT stakeholders, Dimension Data's team suggested a cloud solution for AX and its associated functions, as well as for other core systems such as email. Westland decided to use Dimension Data's Managed Cloud Platform and, within five weeks, Dimension Data had deployed the servers, built the infrastructure, and worked with Westland's application developers and IT experts to install the AX and backend databases on the platform.

An MCP for backup and recovery ensures that data is backed up and mission-critical applications can be quickly restored without impacting on production.

The cloud solution was ready in time for the weekend testing. Some component parts had already been tested and it was now time to test the business application as a complete solution. Overall, the cutover was a success and well within Westland's disaster recovery targets. No data was lost, and users were able to log in after 1.75 hours.

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 Result

Lower costs through scalability

As Westland is paying only for what it consumes, it saves on location, hosting and server costs. Of the nine servers deployed, only six are turned on during the normal production mode, and about 10% of the time are used for maintenance and patches. It's only in the event of disaster recovery that all servers will be used – and paid for. Dimension Data assures uptime on its MCP and, in the event of a disaster, Westland employees can log in to core applications remotely and continue working.

The cloud solution also means that Westland doesn't have to outlay capital on maintaining its ageing disaster recovery infrastructure. Further costs savings are realised on rack space and its associated power. Based on the success of the solution, Westland will work with Dimension Data to move their remaining systems to the cloud.

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Services overview

- Dimension Data MCP
- deployment services
- licensing subscription service