



Bank boosts growth with comprehensive IT strategy

International banking group reduces the time it takes to deliver new services to branches from days to hours with revamped storage and server infrastructure



Customer profile



Company	Ecobank
Industry	Finance
Country	Ghana
Employees	23,350
Website	www.ecobank.com

Business need

As one of the fastest-growing banking groups in Africa, Ecobank wanted to ensure that its technology could scale to meet demand. With its data centre running out of space, it needed to consolidate its IT infrastructure.

Solution

Ecobank worked with Dell consultants to implement a new IT roadmap. It consolidated its server and storage infrastructure with Dell™ PowerEdge™ blade servers and Dell Compellent™ storage.

Benefits

- Expert consultancy helps bank introduce scalable IT strategy
- A 30 per cent reduction in physical servers delivers savings
- Customers gain access to new services in four hours rather than four weeks
- Consolidated IT minimises risk and ensures compliance
- Customers receive uninterrupted access to services
- IT team can spend more time on innovative projects

Solutions featured

- Data Center Virtualization
- Enterprise Consulting – Data Center
- Storage
- Support Services

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Tunji Alabi, Group Head of Technology Infrastructure, Ecobank

With 32 banks in Africa and three in London, Paris and Dubai, the Ecobank Group operates as a single bank with common standards, policies and processes. It aims to provide a consistent and reliable service to its 8.4 million customers across its growing network of 1,151 branches, 1,487 cash machines, and 2,151 point-of-sale machines.

Ecobank provides wholesale, retail, investment and transactional banking services to governments, financial institutions, multinationals, local companies and individuals. It delivers services through three customer-focused business segments – Corporate Bank, Domestic Bank and Ecobank Capital – which are all supported by an integrated IT platform operated by eProcess, the group's technology subsidiary in Ghana.

Tunji Alabi, Group Head of Technology Infrastructure, Ecobank, says: "With more than 1,000 branches across sub-Saharan Africa and beyond, Ecobank is one of the fastest-growing banking groups in Africa. Our technology organisation eProcess needs to ensure that we provide each arm of the business with a reliable, highly available IT service 24/7. In our business, any downtime can be catastrophic – in some countries, it can even result in civil unrest. We're also acquiring new banks all the time, so we need to make sure our IT infrastructure can support expansion."

Strategic partnership delivers technology platform for the future

Ecobank found that its IT team was becoming overwhelmed by day-to-day maintenance and there was no clear roadmap for the future. Alabi says: "We didn't have a central strategy for buying or managing new technologies, and we were acquiring new businesses at such a rate that we'd run out of space in our central data centre in Accra."

Following a series of workshops, Ecobank decided to work with the Dell Consulting team to introduce a technology strategy. Alabi says: "The Dell consultants organised four workshops, during which they identified our core business challenges. They drew up a comprehensive strategy that could meet our immediate needs for simplified management. The team then looked at how we could introduce an innovative technology platform to cope with our future business needs."

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Technology at work

Services

Dell Enterprise Consulting
– Data Center

Dell Deployment Services

Dell Support Services
– Dell ProSupport™

Dell Compellent™ Copilot Support

Hardware

Dell™ PowerEdge™ M610 and M910 blade servers

Dell Compellent Storage Center storage arrays

Dell PowerConnect™ switches

Dell PowerVault™ DL2200 backup to disk appliance

Software

VMware® vSphere™ 4
– VMware vMotion™

Dell provided 45 days of consulting services to ensure Ecobank received the end-to-end solution it needed. Alabi says: "Dell consultants worked closely with us to understand our requirements and deliver a reliable, efficient, scalable infrastructure that could support our fast-growing business. Their expertise and dedication ensured a successful project from start to finish."

A 30 per cent reduction in physical servers cuts costs, power and space

With a more streamlined, scalable infrastructure in place, Ecobank can continue to grow without being held back by its hardware resources. The IT team started its technology revamp by updating and virtualizing its server environment. Alabi says: "Our data centre was stretched to its limit. We simply didn't have any space left to house new hardware. Dell came up with a solution that could help us consolidate and standardise our server environment." The company's central IT team decided to introduce 72 Dell™ PowerEdge™ M610 blade servers and 12 Dell PowerEdge M910 servers with Dell PowerConnect™ switches and a Dell PowerVault™ DL2200 backup to disk appliance, powered by CommVault. It also decided to virtualize its servers with VMware® vSphere™ 4 server software.

Alabi says: "Our virtualized Dell server infrastructure has reduced power, space and operating costs. Even though we've introduced new, more powerful Dell hardware to replace some of our HP servers, we've managed to cut the number of physical servers we need by at least 30 per cent."

Extensive virtualization is helping the bank integrate new branches into the Ecobank Group more easily than before. Alabi says: "We're running around 350 virtual machines at the moment. That means we've freed up space in our data centre in Accra, as well as our new data centres in London and Paris. We have a server environment that can scale easily so

we don't need to buy new hardware to keep up with growing customer and employee demand."

Simplified IT cuts time to provision services from four weeks to four hours

Now that the IT team can get new technologies up and running more quickly, Ecobank employees can access new services in a matter of hours rather than weeks. As a result, customers have greater confidence that they will also have access to the banking services they need, when they need them.

To complement its new server environment, Ecobank implemented seven Dell Compellent™ Storage Center storage arrays across its three data centres in Accra, London and Paris. The Dell servers and storage arrays run a range of business applications, including those used for email and printing.

Alabi says: "We started using the Dell Compellent storage arrays on a try-before-you-buy basis. Once we'd used them for a few days, we knew we wanted to keep them. The Dell Compellent storage arrays have dramatically simplified day-to-day IT management, while providing us with a more dynamic, scalable technology infrastructure."

The virtualized environment gives Ecobank an efficient, high-performance pool of storage, which is shared by all its servers and applications. The IT team can add and remove capacity when it's needed without disrupting operations or suspending access to data. Alabi says: "Our simplified Dell storage infrastructure has improved customer satisfaction. It has helped us to set up new services in just four hours rather than four weeks. That's a massive saving for us, and it means we can spend a lot more time working on strategic projects, such as the implementation of an innovative cloud platform that we hope to introduce by the end of the year."

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Consolidated IT reduces costs and ensures compliance with industry standards

The introduction of the Dell Compellent storage arrays has helped Ecobank reduce its total cost of ownership while meeting industry standards, including Payment Card Industry (PCI) Data Security Standards (DSS) compliance. Alabi says: "Our high-performing, easy-to-manage Dell storage infrastructure has dramatically reduced maintenance times, which has a huge effect on total cost of ownership. We're spending less time and money on management, and by standardising on a virtualized environment, we've reduced power and space costs."

As with all banking organisations, managing risk and ensuring regulatory compliance are key priorities for Ecobank. Alabi says: "Our new Dell infrastructure gives us a secure, reliable environment. It's easier to perform vital tasks such as backups, while the introduction of the Dell Compellent storage arrays has enabled us to align our business with the banking industry's PCI DSS certification programme. With improved data encryption, for example, we can meet strict requirements for business storage that help us stay compliant with industry standards while keeping ahead of our competitors."

Improved uptime helps achieve better business continuity

With a more efficient and stable server and storage infrastructure, the Ecobank IT team can ensure employees and customers remain unaffected by any technology failure. Alabi says: "Uptime is high compared with our previous IT infrastructure. That means we can guarantee that the customers who walk into our banks will receive a good service. By continuing to improve the overall customer experience, we can carry on winning new business while keeping our existing customers happy."

"The built-in resilience of the Dell technology, together with tools such as VMware vMotion, give us a high degree of availability. We can migrate virtual machines from one physical server to another instantly with zero downtime – and when we perform maintenance, it has no impact on our employees. That's a real benefit for us because interruption to business continuity can have serious consequences in some of the countries in which we operate."

IT team has more time to work on innovative projects

Dedicated consultancy and support from Dell is helping Ecobank's IT team focus on developing more innovative technology solutions that will help it stay ahead of its competitors. Alabi says: "Compared with some of the

other technology providers we've worked with, Dell has an extraordinary ability to look beyond the technology. Whether it's been the workshops, the consultancy or the enterprise-level support we've received through Dell ProSupport and Dell Compellent Copilot Support, Dell always comes to the table as a strategic partner. The timings, costs and internal processes are always well thought through, and the consultants consistently provide us with practical strategies that fit our business model."

Now that Ecobank has a simplified infrastructure on which it can depend, the company's IT team can start to implement the strategy it developed together with Dell. Alabi says: "We're about to move into the next phase of our IT strategy and start working on introducing a cloud solution that will be based on Dell servers and solutions. It will deliver a new level of dynamism and scalability that we hope will give us a real edge in our competitive industry."

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