



Multi-Tier SAP® Availability Blooms Year-Round at Ball Horticultural Company

Your business has become a global player. That's great, but when your company begins to act on the worldwide stage, you quickly learn that while you are fast asleep, people elsewhere in your new realm are hard at work. In this non-stop environment, your business data and applications have to be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, without exception.

Ball Horticultural Company is an excellent example of a global performer. This world leader in the development, production and marketing of floriculture crops has facilities in North and South America, Europe, Africa, Australia and Asia. Its business never sleeps. Ball's SAP R/3®-based data and applications have to be available all of the time. How is that possible in an uncertain world where things can and do occasionally go wrong? And, how is it possible in a world where systems require regular maintenance? Ball Horticultural Company knows how. MIMIX® makes it possible.

Growing Success

Founded in 1905 by George J. Ball, Ball Horticultural Company is a private firm based in West Chicago, Illinois, USA. Since its inception, it has been run by three generations of the Ball family. The company produces and distributes live plant products and seeds, sold exclusively to professional growers. In addition, it is a major presence in plant and seed research.

Ball

When people hear the words "private" and "family run" they might think "small," but nothing could be farther from the truth in the case of Ball Horticultural Company. It employs 3,300 people and owns the largest horticultural supplier in North America. An acquisition in 2001 also launched a major push into Europe and Australia, and joint ventures and startups in

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South Africa, Korea and South America have solidified the company's position as a world leader in floriculture. In total, its operations span 22 countries and six continents.

Like any prudent organization, Ball Horticultural Company backs up its data to ensure that it will be able to recover its business should a disaster strike. This nightly task used to require stopping the SAP applications for about half an hour to bring the system to a point where a backup could be performed.



Images courtesy of
Ball Horticultural Company

MIMIXTM
The Power of Information AvailabilityTM
SOFTWARE. SERVICES. SUPPORT...for iSeries

The downtime required for backups wasn't a problem while the systems served only North America. Then, stopping applications for a half an hour in the middle of the night had little impact on the business. But it immediately became an issue when Ball looked at integrating its operations in the Netherlands because the nightly downtime occurred at the start of the European business day. In addition, the company now accepts orders around-the-clock over the Internet. Because of these two developments, there are no longer any "off-hours" during which regular system and database maintenance can be accommodated.

A Lesson Learned

Even if backups and other maintenance could be scheduled in order to have the least possible business impact, they are not the only things that can bring business to a halt. Unexpected hardware or application failures are always a concern. Whether they are caused by human error, natural disaster or just plain defective equipment that fails of its own accord, the impact is the same: if hot-backup systems are not readily available, the business can suffer serious downtime.

Back in 1996, before it had installed MIMIX, Ball unexpectedly lost both of two mirrored disk drives simultaneously, a loss which shut their business systems down for 96 hours. While Ball is a private company that doesn't release financial results, it is easy to imagine the effect that a four-day IT shutdown would have on any company's profitability. Clearly, Ball needed a

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way to avoid such seemingly unavoidable incidents in the future. It solved its downtime dilemma with MIMIX, from Lakeview Technology.

MIMIX is a unique robust availability designed to provide SAP R/3 users with advanced Information Availability functionality. Should access to a primary

system be lost, whether because of planned maintenance or due to an unexpected event, MIMIX can seamlessly and automatically switch operations to a MIMIX-managed replica system on which up-to-date data and applications reside. The replica system can then assume full responsibility for the operation of the SAP R/3 environment. With proper planning and implementation of the MIMIX solution, this switch can be handled so smoothly users are not even aware that a problem occurred. That's because MIMIX leverages the sophisticated MIMIX Model Switch Framework™, a comprehensive switching standard that ensures flexible and highly customizable application and database switching implementations in specific application environments.

In Ball's three-tier SAP environment, switching between the primary and backup systems can be transparent, without any interruption to the business applications.

MIMIX accommodates all R/3 architectures including two-tier, three-tier and multiple System IDs (SIDs). Ball Horticultural Company operates in a three-tier SAP environment that includes an iSeries™ model 840 that manages the primary database and an iSeries model 830 that serves as the "hot-standby" backup system. In addition, an AS/400® SB3 application server front-ends the primary database server.

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The True Value of Availability

How confident is Ball that its Information Availability environment works as promised? Completely. It has proven the switching capabilities through actual use in its operations.

Recently, when the company needed to upgrade its iSeries operating system, it first performed the upgrade on the backup server. For a few weeks the primary and backup servers were running different versions of OS/400®.

That was no problem for MIMIX. It continued to replicate data and objects between the two faultlessly. When it was ready to upgrade the primary server's operating system, Ball switched users to the backup. After completing the upgrade, it switched users back.

The whole upgrade process was painless. And, instead of the full weekend of downtime that Ball used to experience when upgrading its operating system before it implemented MIMIX, the company reports that each switch between the two servers was accomplished in just five to ten minutes.

In addition to providing a robust High Availability environment, MIMIX also solves the data-backup downtime issue. Because it is always up-to-date with the production server data, backups can now be performed on the hot-standby system. Production applications and data are unaffected by the process.

Ball's confidence in its backup systems and switching capabilities also provided an opportunity to control data-storage costs. Faced with a need to buy additional disks as its requirements increased, the company realized that since MIMIX provides a continuously up-to-date backup copy of all data and objects, it no longer needed to mirror disks on both primary and backup servers. It was able to save disk space by converting from mirroring to RAID and was able to defer the purchase of new disks. Naturally, the conversion process was as painless as the operating system upgrade since the company was able to switch users to the backup system while it performed the conversion.

Why Lakeview and MIMIX?

Ball looked at the alternatives in the marketplace, but two factors tipped the scales decidedly in favor of Lakeview Technology's MIMIX solution: Lakeview's people

and the SAP-specialized version of MIMIX.

The phrase "People Power the Experience" permeates all aspects of Lakeview Technology's business. Ball Horticultural Company has certainly learned what Lakeview means by that expression.

"The implementation went very well," commented **Doreen Anderson, SAP Basis Manager at Ball.**

"Lakeview brought in a consultant from their Belgium office – the top MIMIX for SAP expert in the world. There were three scheduled visits, with very well defined agendas, and the project remained right on track. The bottom line is that Lakeview's people are top notch – and I'm quite hard on consultants."


"The people were an important factor," added **Sharon Gunia, Ball's CIO.** "But the fact that Lakeview was the only one with a specialized solution for SAP was also important. Because of this customization, MIMIX automates many of the things that need to be done in the SAP environment."

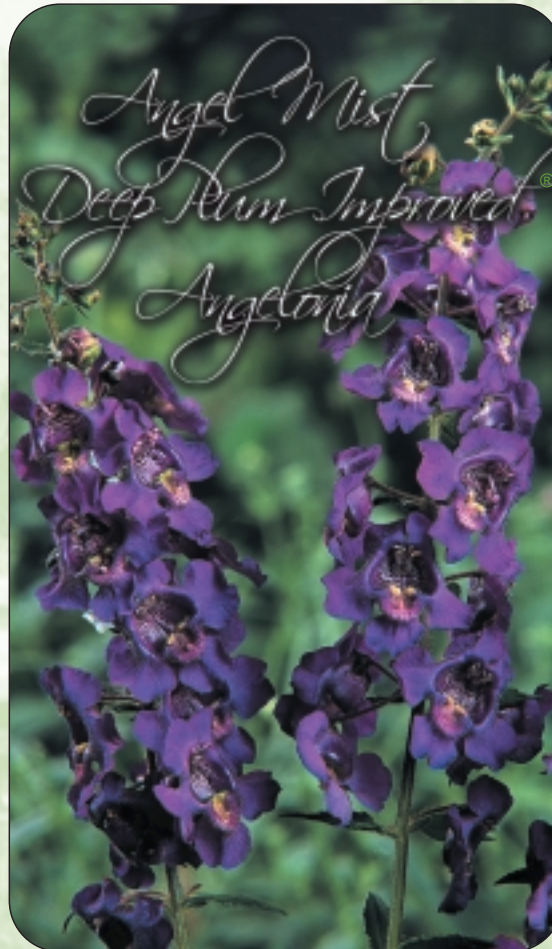
Keep on Growing

At Ball Horticultural Company, business is a growing experience,

both figuratively and literally. As it

expands its business around the world, including a wider Internet presence, data and application uptime become more critical than ever. Like most companies, Ball is now so dependent on its systems that if its SAP R/3 applications were to stop or its data were to become unavailable, its business would virtually stop. The consequences would be unthinkable.

That will never be a problem for Ball Horticultural Company. Not now. MIMIX ensures that its data and applications are always available, without exception. 



Ball Horticultural Company

HQ: West Chicago, Illinois, USA

Industry: Production and Distribution of Seed and Live Plants

Mission Critical Applications: SAP R/3® ERP

IT Environment: 3-Tier: iSeries Models 830 and 840
with SB3 Application Servers

Business Initiative: High Availability for Global Continuous Operations

Availability Solution: MIMIX from Lakeview Technology



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