



## Downtime: Good for People, Bad for Systems

**N**eed a vacation? A little “downtime” to relax, to get away from it all? We all do. Reka, the second largest provider of vacation homes and hotels in Switzerland, has given Swiss workers the opportunity to take family vacations at a reasonable cost since 1939. A nonprofit enterprise based in Bern, Reka works with employers to offer discount vouchers as part of employee benefits packages. Employees can use the vouchers, called Reka Checks, for vacation or travel expenses.

Reka's business model has been extremely successful for over half a century. Today, an average of 2 million Swiss, more than 25 percent of the population, use Reka Checks to pay for their vacations in some of the most desirable regions of Switzerland, Italy, France, Spain and Austria. But when Reka decided to use the Internet to expand its market reach worldwide, it realized it needed some help to get there. The company found the total solution it needed in Lakeview Technology's MIMIX® and OmniEnterprise™ solution suites.

### Everyone Deserves a Vacation

From its inception, the Reka program was designed to help make vacations more affordable by enlisting the support of companies looking for unique employee benefits. For example, a company may offer to its

employees Reka Checks with a face value of 100 Swiss francs, but charge the employee only 80 francs. The 20-franc savings represent a fringe benefit for the employee. This built-in discount means the employee's 100-franc Reka Check is more valuable than cash when used toward a family vacation.



Reka owns and operates approximately 6,000 vacation spots that accept Reka Checks. Since the checks do not expire, individuals and families can spend their checks immediately or save them for a future vacation. Sometimes families do not spend the money for two or three years. On average, Reka Checks circulate for about 200 days before they are used.

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Reka benefits from this arrangement in part by receiving a percentage of profits from participating tourist organizations and in part from careful investment of funds related to unredeemed Reka Checks. Whatever the source, Reka uses its earnings to subsidize vacations for lower-income



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people – for instance, offering single parents a family vacation free of cost – or reinvests the money to purchase or renovate vacation homes, allowing more people to use their Reka Checks in more places.

### **Breaking through Borders**

Being designated nonprofit does not mean Reka does not need to think about how to expand its business prospects. To the contrary, more business means more money that can be put toward helping lower-income people finance a much-needed vacation.

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So, recently, Reka embarked on a bold new strategy to make its services available to tourists outside Switzerland, via the Web. The company hopes to attract customers from Germany, the U.S. and elsewhere who are looking to vacation in some of the most popular resort areas of Europe, where Reka operates its vacation properties.

There is a precedent for this kind of non-voucher service in Reka's operations. Currently, Swiss tourists who want to book a vacation at one of Reka's sites can do so whether or not they pay for it with Reka Checks. However, those who do not use Reka Checks clearly pay full price for their vacation, therefore helping to subsidize the vacations of lower-income folks. Reka now wants to expand this aspect of its service beyond its geographic borders. The company decided the most efficient way to reach potential new customers globally would be through the Internet.

Implementing this strategy, however, presented Reka with two challenges that had to be addressed. The first: managing and moving vacation-rental data bi-directionally between its IBM® AS/400® system and its new Windows NT®/SQL Server™ system on which eCommerce applications reside. The second: maintaining the integrity of its service reputation by ensuring High Availability and Continuous Operations for the new

eCommerce site, [www.reka.ch](http://www.reka.ch).

Reka's research for a comprehensive solution ultimately led it to Lakeview Technology's OmniEnterprise and MIMIX solution suites. Working with Exogen, a Lakeview Premier Marketing Partner and an IBM Premier Business Partner headquartered in Matzingen, Switzerland, Reka soon learned how MIMIX could afford no-exceptions availability for core applications and data on its AS/400 environment while OmniEnterprise facilitated bi-directional, near real-time movement of heterogeneous data from the AS/400 platform to the Windows NT platform. Exogen demonstrated how MIMIX and OmniEnterprise were the right fit for Reka's new eBusiness initiative, and Exogen's reputation, experience and expertise about both the problem and the solution convinced Reka to follow its recommendations.

### **Bringing Data Together with OmniEnterprise**

Like those of many modern businesses, Reka's systems comprise a heterogeneous computing environment. The company employs two IBM AS/400s and five Windows NT servers, which communicate via the TCP/IP protocol.

When Reka decided to make its rental properties available over the Web, administrators decided it would be best to maintain production on the AS/400, but run the eCommerce functions on NT, which they prefer as a Web server.

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However, this meant that the AS/400 would still house the critical business data – such as information on reservations, room availability, etc. – that Web-based customers would need to access before they could decide to book with Reka. Reka required a solution that facilitated bi-directional movement of segments of this data, which change quickly and frequently, between

an IBM DB2® database on AS/400 and a SQL Server database on Windows NT.

With OmniEnterprise, Exogen and Lakeview offered Reka the prospect of a turnkey solution that would enable this bi-directional replication of heterogeneous data in near real-time. One component of the solution suite, OmniReplicator™, provides near real-time change-based replication and synchronization, while OmniCopy™ enables snapshot copy management for periodic updates or refreshes. The components are used in conjunction with each other, along with OmniDirector™, which provides ease-of-use for administrators through an intuitive graphical-management console for setup, deployment and monitoring of enterprise-wide data movement. The total solution gives Reka the ability to simplify the movement of complex data with no coding, scripts or SQL calls.

### Staying Live with MIMIX

While a little downtime now and then is good for people, every company works to avoid computer system downtime. Reka's management knew that putting its business on the Web would make this potential problem more than just a headache – it could mean serious consequences for its business and its reputation.

Before consulting with Exogen, Reka used two AS/400s for production, but did not have a backup system in place. This made implementing a High Availability solution absolutely critical. In addition, Reka employs about 100 people, only five of whom are IT staff. With such limited resources, coding and implementing its own High Availability solution in-house was out of the question.

Exogen directed Reka toward Lakeview's MIMIX suite for the solution to its High Availability concerns. Application-independent, MIMIX is specifically designed to ensure availability for business-critical processes such as eCommerce, business intelligence, server consolidation or custom applications.


MIMIX replicates applications, data and objects from a production AS/400 to a secondary AS/400 server. In the event of an unplanned outage, such as a hardware failure, the secondary AS/400 can be used as a production server until the primary system is restored. The MIMIX solution is also crucial to providing Continuous Operations in the case of planned events, which can tie up system capacity, such as batch work, large queries, or system maintenance and upgrades. At such times, MIMIX transparently switches users to the secondary server, capturing any data and system object updates applied on the backup system, and then automatically replicating them back to the primary system when it is again available.

If Reka hoped to use the Internet to open its vacation sites to an expanded pool of consumers, the prospect of its Web site going down represented too great a risk. With the implementation of MIMIX, however, Reka can now count on no-exceptions Continuous Operations and High Availability to help present the best possible level of service to new customers worldwide.

MIMIX and OmniEnterprise underwent thorough testing after installation on Reka's system, going live after just three weeks. Reka uses the total solution to provide reliable, real-time data replication and the assurance of continuous availability.



The immediate operational benefits to Reka are clear. But, now that Reka can have confidence in the reliability of its eCommerce operations, an even more important

benefit will soon be achieved, as more people book their vacations with Reka and help to provide funding for families who might not otherwise be able to afford a vacation. 



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