“Thanks to HP, we have been able to transform our business. Customers who visit our branches no longer have to wait for transactions to be processed - it’s all done immediately.”
Sina Joseph, head of IT, Access Bank
Access Bank plc is a full-service commercial bank, operating through a network of 30 branches located in the major commercial centres of Nigeria. The Bank was incorporated in 1989 as a privately owned commercial bank, and was listed on the Nigerian Stock Exchange in 1998.

In January 2002, Access Bank plc was successfully recapitalised and new management was put in place to reposition the bank as one of Nigeria’s leading financial institutions. To achieve this transformation and extend its services to international customers, Access Bank needed a world-class IT infrastructure. More specifically, it had to be able to accommodate growth in customer numbers and transaction volumes without any negative impact on performance and availability. It also had to be able to deliver competitive new services such as telephone banking and Internet banking.

Unfortunately, the bank’s existing infrastructure could not meet these needs, so Access Bank went in search of a supplier capable of carrying out a complete system upgrade. Despite competitive bids from both IBM and Sun, the contract was awarded to HP.

According to Access Bank’s head of IT, Sina Joseph, the choice was not a difficult one to make.

“HP has a well-deserved reputation as a top-class manufacturer of manageable, flexible, scalable technology,” he commented. “We were also very impressed by the benchmark tests we carried out with HP-UX and Oracle, showing performance gains of more than 60 per cent compared to our existing infrastructure.”

HP’s understanding of the application layer requirements was another important decision factor. HP’s Financial Services Industry (FSI) team was able to demonstrate extensive experience of the bank’s core business application, FLEXCUBE from i-flex. The team was also prepared to work closely with both i-flex and Oracle to ensure a successful implementation.

Close co-operation
Access Bank invited HP to design and implement a completely new infrastructure. To provide business continuity, HP designed a cluster of two hard-partitioned HP rp7410 servers distributed across the bank’s main office and a second site, with fibre connections, two storage area networks.
SANs), and a robust data replication solution. The project also included training and ongoing HP Business Continuity Services to provide Access Bank with a total customer experience. The hardware for the project was sourced through HP’s local partner, Management Information Systems/Allied Computers, while Oracle and i-flex were involved in migrating the database and core application to the new infrastructure.

According to Joseph, close co-operation between Access Bank, HP and its partners ensured that the implementation was completed successfully within a very short time frame. HP later acknowledged the key role played by Access Bank’s own team in this success by selecting the project for an award as the best implementation of a core banking system on HP 9000 systems in West Africa.

Increased agility
Even though maintenance costs have been cut by 40 per cent, the new infrastructure provides Access Bank with greatly improved performance for its core banking application. The system run carried out at the end of each working day, for example, now takes less than three hours as opposed to eight hours with the previous system. Similarly, the duration of a complete Oracle backup has been cut from two hours to less than 20 minutes. Reliability is no longer an issue because the system is completely stable.

Furthermore, claims Joseph, the redundancy of the architecture means that business continuity is assured even if disaster strikes. “The move to Internet banking demanded a firm commitment to becoming a 24x7 operation. Thanks to the HP solution, we know that we will not have any problems with availability,” he commented.

Access Bank has also been able to deploy Oracle 9i, with its robust reporting functionality and implemented the highest version of FLEXCUBE UBS 6.2. Information is now available to users very quickly over the Internet, with the result being that the bank can respond much more promptly to requests from its customers, whether they are based locally or internationally anywhere in the world.

“Thanks to HP, we have been able to transform our business. Customers who visit our branches no longer have to wait for transactions to be processed - it's all done immediately. If instead they choose to use our Internet banking solution, they know that their account data will appear on the screen without any delays,” explained Joseph.

More generally, Joseph claims, the new infrastructure provides Access Bank with increased agility to deliver competitive services that surpass those available from its rivals. To enrich its portfolio, it can add new

Customer at a glance:
Industry sector: Financial services
Name: Access Bank plc
Headquarters: Lagos, Nigeria
Founded: 1989
Telephone: +234 1 461 9264-9269
Number of employees: 650
Annual revenues: NGN 5.5 billion (£340 million approx.)
URL: www.accessbankplc.com

Partners at a glance:
Company: Management Information Systems/Allied Computers
Company: Oracle Corporation
Headquarters: Redwood Shores, California, USA
Founded: 1977
Telephone: +1 650 506 7000
Number of employees: 40,000
Annual revenues: $10.1 billion (£11.9 billion approx.)
URL: www.oracle.com
Business: Software
Products: Oracle Database 10g, Application Server, e-Business Suite, Developer Suite, Enterprise Manager, Collaboration Suite, Data Hub

Company: i-flex solutions
Headquarters: Mumbai, India
Number of employees: 3,300
URL: www.iflexsolutions.com
Business: Provider of IT solutions to the financial services industry
Products: FLEXCUBE, Prime Sourcing, Reveleus, Daybreak
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Solution</th>
<th>Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Become a leading financial institution offering services internationally as well as locally.</td>
<td>• Engage HP to design and implement the new infrastructure.</td>
<td>• System performance has improved markedly, for example, a complete Oracle backup now takes 20 minutes rather than two hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Implement a world-class IT infrastructure.</td>
<td>• Install a fully redundant architecture across two different sites, based on a cluster of two HP rp7410 servers and two SANs.</td>
<td>• Maintenance costs have been cut by 40 per cent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Maintain high levels of system performance and availability in the face of growing customer numbers and transaction volumes.</td>
<td>• Carry out a collaborative implementation involving Oracle and i-flex, as well as HP and the bank’s own in-house team.</td>
<td>• System reliability and availability are no longer a cause for concern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deliver competitive new services to customers.</td>
<td>• Source hardware from local HP partner, Management Information Systems/Allied Computers.</td>
<td>• Customer requests can be dealt with promptly, and long waits at branches are a thing of the past.</td>
</tr>
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With increased computing power at its disposal, the bank plans to implement a customer relationship management (CRM) solution in the near future. In conjunction with HP, it is also planning a server consolidation project that will see it running several applications on a small number of disaster-tolerant systems.

For more information on how working with HP can benefit you, please contact your local HP sales representative or reseller, or visit www.hp.com.