



«A decentralized organization that uses shared applications and processes must have a strong digital backbone.»



Every day, staff at the organization «SOS Children's Villages International» work to ensure that children in 134 countries and territories can grow up in a loving, caring family environment. Global networks and the use of standardized applications play an important part in their success. In this interview, Thomas Rubatscher, International Director ICT, and Oliver Vavtar, Team Leader for Network Services and Project Leader for the SOS Data Highway, explain how they and their teams make an important contribution to the organization's success despite limited resources.

Hermann Gmeiner set up the first SOS Children's Village in Imst, Austria, in 1949. Ever since, SOS Children's Villages has been an independent, non-governmental development organisation which has been working to meet the needs and protect the rights of children. Active in 134 countries and territories, it works to prevent family breakdown and provide alternative care for children who have lost parental care.

www.sos-childrensvillages.org

Mr. Rubatscher, can you give us a quick overview of how SOS Children's Villages is organized?

Thomas Rubatscher: Our main goal is to be as close as possible to the beneficiary – the child in need. To achieve this, our 134 country subsidiaries and territories work with a great deal of autonomy, in some cases even operating as independent legal bodies with their own boards and statutes. All the national organizations are members of the international umbrella association «SOS Children's Villages International», which coordinates global initiatives and uses regional offices to support country subsidiaries in the areas of finance, fundraising, IT and communications.

What are the implications of this decentralized organizational structure for IT?

T. R.: A certain degree of global coordination always makes sense in IT. Coherent, universal systems are cheaper to operate and generally easier to manage. Although we have to get by with fairly modest means, we still want to run everything in a professional manner and support our colleagues directly in their work with a reliable, secure and high-performance infrastructure. Nowadays, a stable and secure IT system isn't just a workplace necessity, it's also a clear indication that you're a professional and trustworthy organization. For us, this is especially important, since we're increasingly involved in collaborations at all levels with external partners fundraising and support associations.

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Oliver Vavtar: We provide the organization with a range of standardized applications, including databases, specialized accounting and fundraising applications, Office 365, an intranet, and Skype for Business.

And how do you guarantee the availability of these applications?

O. V.: A decentralized organization that uses shared applications and processes must have a strong digital backbone. The SOS Data Highway, which connects the 14 different regional offices, is run with this purpose in mind. The network is based on internet technology and is secure and highly available, ensuring that the applications can be used around the clock. At the same time, we also provide the regional offices with secure local access to the internet.

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You run the SOS Data Highway in collaboration with Open Systems. What were the deciding factors in your choice of partner?

T. R.: We wanted an integrated solution, which means we needed connectivity, security and a 24x7 service all from the same provider. In our view, that's the only way to ensure a high-quality network in terms of security, availability and speed.

Are there any other conditions that a partner should fulfill, in your opinion?

T. R.: There are – mostly in the area of transparency. For one thing, we want to retain full control of our network, and to know what's happening on it at all times – buying a black box would be too dangerous. We have constant access to the audit trail, which tells us precisely who has done what, and why they've done it. The ticketing system lets us know which building sites are open and which locations are affected by this. That kind of transparency is very helpful to us, particularly in our discussions with colleagues on the ground. We're all looking at the same statistics

and reports, which means sources of error can be rapidly identified and we can work quickly to find solutions.

O. V.: The other decisive area is cost, and we expect complete transparency here, too. At the moment, we pay a fixed yearly service charge, which covers all tickets, changes and interactions with the security engineers. Even technology-based risks like unforeseen investments in hardware and software are included. This obviously keeps budgeting simple, as there are no additional costs involved. Financial surprises are something we can't, and won't, allow for.

The Data Highway has been operational for three years now. How has the experience been?

T. R.: We've implemented the project quickly, without a hitch, and within budget. Regional feedback has been very good and our colleagues really value the high availability and stability.

O. V.: Thanks to Open Systems' operational support, we have the internal resources we need to take care of our core business. Having a professional standard of capacity management is a big part of this: today we can identify bottlenecks early on, analyze the reasons for large data volumes and – when it comes to business-critical traffic – plan bandwidth increases well in advance and budget accordingly.

And how have you found the collaboration with Open Systems in general?

T. R.: The security engineers at Open Systems have a truly excellent understanding of their craft, and our collaboration with them is based on mutual trust. With Open Systems, we really are in excellent hands.

If you have any questions about this case study, please contact **Thierry Aubry**, aub@open.ch **Florian Hackaj**, flh@open.ch

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