rackspace® HOSTING

AT–A–GLANCE

CUSTOMER'S BUSINESS: Designing and manufacturing innovative kitchen gadgets

CHALLENGES: With one of their products about to be featured on a popular TV show, the small company needed to prepare for huge traffic to their ecommerce site

RACKSPACE SOLUTION: Cloud Servers with a managed service level, Cloud Files

BUSINESS OUTCOME: A flexible, affordable solution that allowed them to easily handle 150,000 customers an hour

prepara®
chef's performance tools™

PREPARA HANDLES HUGE ECOMMERCE TRAFFIC ON THE CLOUD

Using Rackspace® Cloud Servers™ with managed service level, the kitchen gadget makers didn't miss a sale

Prepara is a designer and manufacturer of innovative kitchen utensils and accessories. The company is helmed by two industrial designers, Dean Chapman and Ed Kilduff, whose industrial design consulting firm, the SoHo-based Pollen Design, was founded in 1997.

The company has 20 employees, and Prepara's goods can be found in stores including Williams Sonoma and Bed Bath & Beyond, as well as stores throughout Europe.

To design and manage its website, Prepara calls on Sound-n-Vision, a creative agency providing professional website design, search engine optimization, and internet marketing. Sound-n-Vision has been a Rackspace customer since 2002.

THE OPPORTUNITY: BIG EXPOSURE, HUGE TRAFFIC

In November 2010, Prepara found out that one of their products, the Herb-Savor, was going to be featured on a highly popular national television program. The show's producers warned Ed Kilduff, co-founder of Prepara, that in order to be featured on the program, they needed to be ready to handle huge demand. Prepara would need to have a lot of stock on hand, and their website would need to withstand a serious spike in traffic—as many as a few million hits in the first 24 hours.

At the time, Prepara was hosted on Rackspace dedicated servers, along with Sound-n-Vision's other clients. Prepara's footprint was small: they used only a single server with minimal RAM. Kilduff called Marc Ensign, CEO at Sound-n-Vision, and asked if his team could help prepare them for this big opportunity, only two weeks away.

The opportunity demanded the scalability of the cloud, but Prepara also needed a managed level of service. Sound-n-Vision has a team of developers, but outsourcing their IT hosting to Rackspace lets them focus on the agency's projects, not on managing servers. Prepara's high-profile exposure would require hands-on monitoring and rapid response.

Ensign reached out to Rackspace about a dedicated solution for Prepara. But the cost of enough dedicated servers to handle the projected traffic was unreasonable for a one-time event. "That just wasn't an option," says Ensign.

Fortunately for Prepara, Rackspace was just launching the pilot program of Cloud Servers with managed service level. "Paul Sims at the Rackspace Cloud reached out to me, and he said 'We can build this in a cloud environment, and we'll manage the servers for you,'" says Ensign. "The Cloud option was much more in line with our budget, and it was totally scalable—a perfect fit."

> "Overnight we went from getting moderate traffic, to getting 150,000 hits in an hour. Our ecommerce site scaled beautifully, ensuring that we could not only show off our products, but also sell them. I would recommend the Rackspace Cloud to anyone."
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> **Ed Kilduff,** co-founder, Prepara

"It could not have gone better. Without the ability to spin servers up and down as we needed them, and without the team at Rackspace, I can guarantee it would have been a disaster."

Marc Ensign, CEO, Sound-n-Vision

THE SOLUTION: CLOUD SERVERS™, CLOUD FILES™, AND AN EXTERNAL PAYMENT GATEWAY

Prepara had a short timeframe to get ready, and within 12 hours, Rackspace engineers had Prepara's servers set up on Rackspace Cloud Servers with managed service level, ready for whatever traffic the Herb-Savor's television stardom would bring their way.

Ryan Walker was one of the Rackspace engineers who helped set up Prepara's configuration. "Prepara used seven 2GB CentOS Cloud Servers for production," says Walker. "They also used two Cloud Servers running HAProxy for load balancing between the Web servers, and two database servers with Master/Master replication."

Prepara also used Cloud Files to serve static files and images from the website, alleviating the load on the servers. To avoid issues with PCI compliance, Prepara used an external payment gateway to handle their credit card transactions. This meant that they handed off credit card traffic to a third party, instead of having to process them on their own servers.

"We also used a Varnish caching layer that was right in front of the load balancers," says Paul Sims, who was the lead tech working with the Prepara account at Rackspace. "Varnish proxies the request and stores them in RAM, so it will serve dynamic content that doesn't need to be generated every time. We also used Memcached for session persistence across the Web servers. If we were doing this today, we'd also be able to use Rackspace Cloud Load Balancers, instead of using HAProxy."

"IT WENT OFF WITHOUT A HITCH"

Before the television appearance, Prepara's products had been featured in many magazines and newspapers, but as a growing company, they'd had only moderate traffic to their website. All that changed the moment they appeared on the television program. "We got 150,000 visitors within the first hour of the program airing," says Kilduff. The site consistently handled 100,000-150,000 visitors at a time for four straight days after the show aired.

Not only did the Cloud Servers handle the influx of new visitors to Prepara's site, but the Rackspace Cloud also made it possible for Prepara to make all those sales. Indeed, Prepara sold out of their entire stock of Herb-Savors-including two shipping containers' worth of extra stock they had ordered—after the first airing of the show.

Ensign and the Rackspace team then spun down to four Cloud Servers once the initial traffic burst leveled off. A month later, the show's producers called and said the episode was going to air again. Ensign had the servers spun up again, and the site handled the second wave of traffic without issue, just as it had the first time. "The whole thing went off without a hitch," said Kilduff. "It was a great experience for us. I'd recommend the Rackspace Cloud to anyone."

Ensign at Sound-n-Vision agreed. "It was an incredible experience, working with Paul Sims and the whole team," he says. "It could not have gone better. Without the ability to spin servers up and down as we needed them, and without the team at Rackspace, I can guarantee it would have been a disaster."

A GREAT SOLUTION FOR ECOMMERCE

For Ensign and Prepara, Cloud Servers were a perfect fit for a demanding ecommerce problem. The opportunity to have their product featured on a popular show called for scalability, flexibility, and utility-based pricing that matched the amount of server space they needed.

"Managed cloud was an extremely cost-effective solution for us," says Ensign. "Dedicated servers would have been 20 times the cost of using the Cloud. And we got an even better result than we would have on dedicated, because it was scalable. We could have added another 30 servers if we needed them."

For Ensign, it was an experience that he's going to repeat. "We have another client right now that we're developing on the managed cloud," he explains. "They're going to need a similar solution to Prepara—and I'm glad to use the Rackspace Cloud again."

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