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Case Study:

sheego.de

Varnish Plus offered monitoring, expert support and a complement of other tools and benefits

Background

sheego is a part of the German Schwab Versand mail-order company. sheego.de's growth has continued as e-commerce has become the norm, and the Schwab parent company exports its range to 21 countries globally. In 2009, sheego was introduced as an online fashion clothing mail-order company, specializing in mail-order fashion for women sized 40 (UK size 16) and up. The plus-size label offers catalogues, shop-in-shops and a responsive online store built on a wide selection of perfectly cut current fashion trends.

sheego has continued to develop its platform to meet the demands of its growing customer base, with particular focus on site performance, which is key to customer retention and purchase conversions.

Like all growth-oriented e-commerce platforms, performance and stability are key for achieving bottom-line business goals, customer loyalty and satisfaction and to ensure continued growth. As the sheego site grew, its technical needs also changed.

The Challenge: Deliver consistent performance and stability to popular e-commerce platform

The sheego.de shop was originally built on the Intershop platform but was moved to the open-source PHP-based OXID eShop framework. Intershop had its own built-in caching mechanism, but OXID did not, meaning that a caching solution would need to be implemented alongside OXID. Open-source Varnish Cache was introduced with OXID and went live by August 2014.

Once sheego.de went live, they realized they could use expert support in implementing Varnish Cache, meaning that they would need professional support services from the Varnish Software engineers to get the most out of Varnish Cache and ensure the stability of the sheego site. Varnish needed to be integrated into the programming and not excluded from the development process.

Open-source Varnish Cache also did not have enough monitoring tools, while Varnish Plus offered monitoring, expert support and a complement of other tools and benefits.

This led to the decision to move to Varnish Plus in January 2015.

sheego at a glance

Company

- sheego is the brand for fashion-conscious women seeking clothing in sizes 40 (UK size 16) and up. sheego offers catalogues, shop-in-shops, and responsive online shopping platform. The label, founded in 2009, is part of the Schwab company

Size

- 10 applications servers; 2 database servers

Varnish Plus solutions for sheego

- Professional support and expertise from Varnish engineers for onboarding and on-time delivery of live platform
- Varnish Administration Console (VAC) for central site administration and management
- Varnish Custom Statistics (VCS) for more granular and efficient monitoring and analytics
- Varnish High Availability for replication across their three Varnish servers: No customer impact or downtime

21
Countries
Globally

10
Application
Servers

Solution: Varnish Plus and Varnish professional support services

The sheego.de e-commerce shop site is both complex and performance intensive. The weight of the site and individual pages make performance the primary concern. sheego wanted to make sure that pages would be delivered with the best performance possible. There are also a number of ongoing digital marketing activities within the site, which further cemented sheego's decision to adopt a high-performance solution to deal with traffic, performance and capacity of the shop site. Varnish Plus would meet these demands. Varnish Plus went live on the sheego platform in early October 2015.

Advanced caching

Moving from a platform with built-in caching meant that sheego was new to managing their own caching but knew they needed a high-performance caching solution: Varnish Cache. sheego upgraded to Varnish Plus to take advantage of the in-depth expertise and support from advanced caching experts in the Varnish Software engineering team.

Size and scale

sheego operates a popular e-commerce platform, which needs to load objects and pages quickly and seamlessly for end users with minimal to no outages and high stability/availability.

Monitoring and analytics

sheego sought a way to reduce the significant amount of time their workforce spent on error and performance analysis.

"When we went live with Varnish Plus in September the professional support from Varnish Software was excellent. I can really recommend it. It was there when we needed it. Our shop is the center of our marketing and business. We go live with our marketing activities during the night to ensure minimal disruption to business, and the support from the Varnish team was there when we needed it, even in the middle of the night."

– *Steven Dagadu, Head of E-Commerce Development
(Leiter E-Commerce Entwicklung)*

Results: Deploying Varnish Plus helped sheego achieve several positive results: :

Security and support: Varnish expertise

For sheego, implementing a complex caching solution without in-house specialization in caching would have been too time consuming. Having Varnish Software professional support ensured on-time, smooth and secure deployment and stability for the site.

Improved performance

When sheego introduced Varnish Cache, there were definite, immediate performance improvements, but they needed professional Varnish support to achieve the stability needed to make those performance gains meaningful. Varnish Plus was introduced at the same time as other upgrades, meaning performance boosts cannot be attributed solely to Varnish Cache Plus, but the overall performance increase has been 30 percent.

More efficient monitoring and reduced staff time

With VAC and VCS, sheego has reaped huge benefits in identifying and tracking problems that come up. Before they had these tools, they spent a lot of time trying to get page and errors data from the backend logs. Varnish Plus monitoring tools deliver the information on performance and caching issues quickly and transparently allowing sheego's staff to respond immediately.

Not only is monitoring more efficient, there is significant time savings in staff working on time-consuming log analysis.

Confident content replication: Availability of content across all servers

Before implementing Varnish High Availability, all of sheego's pages were not replicated across all servers, and sheego was never sure that all pages had been cached across servers, meaning that a user coming to the webpage more than once might see different information because the page had not been cached. Varnish HA solved this issue.

Customization

In cooperation with Varnish Software's experts, sheego adapted a configuration file to ensure that the OXID framework would work optimally with Varnish Plus. While customization was not a key consideration for sheego, knowing that the flexibility is built into Varnish – and Varnish support is there to help with customization – adds significant value.

Return on investment

With better site performance and reduced staff time required in troubleshooting and fixing problems, as well as better insight into the site and customer behaviour using the Varnish monitoring tools, real savings are realized. Above all, Varnish professional support services ensure that sheego is able to go straight to the source when developing new or fixing existing functionality – the savings and expertise conserve time and resources.

The future

sheego has Varnish Plus up and running and will spend the coming months delving deeper into optimizing performance to get the most from their shop. This may include some reduction in the need for as many servers as they currently use once they begin caching both http and https pages. Their online marketing efforts often lead to unforeseen traffic spikes, which is why they have as many servers as they do. But with Varnish Plus, they should be able to achieve more efficiencies to optimize server use.

sheego will soon be able to quantify their own time and infrastructure savings as well as improvements based on customer behaviour (increased customer loyalty, time spent on site, sales conversions, etc.)

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