

# Absa Group

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## SUCCESS STORY

Absa implements a Novell® solution to double its online customer base and become the leading provider of Internet banking services in South Africa.

### OVERVIEW

Absa Group is the largest bank in South Africa, providing banking and financial services to nearly 6 million customers. Absa has extensive local and international networks, and offers a complete range of products and services in personal, commercial and corporate banking, as well as insurance and financial services.

### CHALLENGE

As part of its overall e-business strategy, Absa wanted to provide both Internet access and online banking to existing and future customers. The bank wanted to establish itself as the leader in Internet banking and double its online user base in a year. To achieve such rapid growth, the bank required a solid and scalable technology infrastructure.

With its customer base in the millions, Absa sought a cost-effective Internet access solution to offer online registration, user and resource identity management, as well as e-mail capabilities. The bank needed this new

infrastructure within a three-month time span and with minimal impact on its customers.

### SOLUTION

After evaluating several Unix-based solutions, Absa selected Novell to make its Internet access vision a reality. Working with Novell Consulting, and Inobits Consulting, a Novell Business Expert Systems Integrator, Absa successfully migrated its Internet access infrastructure to a Novell solution including Novell NetWare®, Novell eDirectory®, Novell NetMail™, NMAS™, Novell iFolder® and Novell Cluster Services™.

“We had to choose our partners pretty carefully,” said Santie Botha, group executive director at Absa Group. “We chose Novell and Inobits because we need the peace of mind that our infrastructure is stable and scalable enough to accommodate thousands of online users coming on board.”

Absa, Novell and Inobits Consulting partnered to build a solution based on an open, service-oriented architecture, working closely together on design, testing and maintenance. In three months, the

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team designed a new ISP infrastructure to provide Internet access to new and existing customers.

The Novell-based infrastructure provides 99.97 percent uptime for the bank's Internet access. As the repository for user identity information, Novell eDirectory is the backbone of the bank's Internet access infrastructure. eDirectory simplifies administration and provides secure user authentication, based on identity.

"In addition to our network stability, we've had 100 percent system availability for our eDirectory which includes more than 380,000 objects," said John Francis, manager of Absa Internet Support Services. "I don't think any other product could have done this for us."

Absa soon doubled its online user base and became South Africa's leader in Internet banking with more than 400,000 subscribers, representing a substantial portion of the country's entire Internet user base of nearly three million users. The bank's subscriber base is growing by 250-300 new users per day.

"Today Absa is the most loved financial services brand in South Africa," said Botha. "Nobody in South Africa expected the bank—especially a conservative, middle-of-the-road bank like Absa—to do anything as risky as this. Our ISP adventure with Novell has made us the third largest ISP in South Africa and has paid for itself in less than a year."

To continue to encourage customers to go online, Absa wanted to offer e-mail capabilities for its ISP customers. Absa turned to Novell NetMail, a standards-based messaging solution that provides e-mail, calendaring and schedule sharing across

the Internet. Integrated with eDirectory, NetMail delivers a highly scalable messaging infrastructure at a very low cost.

"We are seeing some impressive stats with NetMail," said Marius Agenbag, director of Inobits Business Solutions. "Absa has about 115,000 active NetMail users and processes about four million messages a week. The peak utilization is around 800 messages processed per minute. The exciting part is that they can do it all on a single CPU."

To further enhance system security and reliability, the bank is also using Novell Cluster Services for NetWare. This solution enables a collection of individual NetWare servers to work together and provide users with the highest availability of network resources. If one network server in the cluster should fail, other servers in the cluster automatically take over, eliminating downtime and allowing IT staff to perform server maintenance which is transparent to users.

## RESULTS

In three months, Absa implemented a Novell solution to provide Internet access for its customers, while creating a more efficient and cost-effective environment. The bank doubled its online user base and has the scalability to keep pace with hundreds of new subscribers a day. Within a year, Absa realized a 100 percent return on investment for its Internet access project.

"The Novell solution has helped us substantially cut our annual system costs," said Botha. "We have been able to offer better Internet services to our customers, while securing and stabilizing our entire infrastructure."

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