

Low-cost computing for manufacturing

Auto parts maker wins productivity race with NComputing

Challenge

Cost-effectively upgrade BLD's computing infrastructure while ensuring high uptime in a harsh manufacturing environment.

Solution

Deploy the NComputing L-series virtual desktop solution in a ratio of four L-series devices per shared PC.

Impact

Realized huge savings in upfront costs; substantial increase in uptime and reliability; significant reduction in electrical use and IT support.

Partner

GHA Technologies (www.gha-associates.com), an NComputing solution partner with offices throughout the U.S.

Factory automation plays a critical role in driving productivity and quality. That is certainly the case for BLD Products, a manufacturer of quality emission and engine control products for automobiles and trucks. The company supplies parts to original equipment manufacturers and the aftermarket. Based in Holland, Michigan, BLD manufacturing operations include light assembly, machining, welding, injection molding, and stamping. The intensely competitive global parts business means that the factory automation systems need to deliver high uptime so that production goals are always met. And given the tight industry margins, computing costs have to be kept under tight control.



BLD deployed NComputing throughout its factory floor.

Old PCs grind down operations

BLD needed to upgrade their computing architecture because their PCs and software were obsolete—nearly six years old and running outdated operating systems. But replacing all of the PCs was too expensive. “We looked at a thin-client solution, but found the high upfront cost for servers, software, and network equipment was also cost-prohibitive,” said J.R. Muller, network administrator at BLD.

BLD turned to systems integrator and NComputing partner GHA Technologies for an affordable alternative. “We took a close look at BLD’s setup and their objectives. We toured the plants to make sure we could deliver the right solution for their particular needs,” said Peter McKeon, technical sales manager at GHA Technologies.

“I love it as a network administrator. The NComputing interface is really easy to configure and use.”

J.R. MULLER
NETWORK ADMINISTRATOR
BLD PRODUCTS

NComputing boosts productivity

“We knew immediately that NComputing was a perfect fit for BLD’s needs,” said Mr. McKeon. That’s because today’s PCs are so powerful that the vast majority of manufacturing and office applications only use a small fraction of the computer’s capacity. NComputing’s virtualization software and hardware tap this unused capacity so that it can be simultaneously shared by multiple users. Each user’s monitor, keyboard, and mouse connect to the shared PC through a small and very durable NComputing access device. The device itself has no CPU, memory, or moving parts so it is rugged, durable, and easy to maintain.

“BLD had concerns about two critical issues: Would NComputing work effectively in their wireless environment, and would it be compatible with their USB-based barcode scanners?” added Mr. McKeon. GHA Technologies performed a series of tests to make sure that the plant’s wireless bridges and software would work properly with the NComputing desktop virtualization software and L-series access devices. The tests showed that NComputing worked well with the existing network and peripherals.

After the successful tests, GHA Technologies began deploying the L-series at the BLD factory. Four NComputing L-series access devices were wirelessly connected to each shared PC. BLD was immediately impressed by how much money they could save. “Instead of replacing every PC workstation in the plant and office, we only had to replace a quarter of them.” NComputing enabled BLD to get four times the productivity from the PC infrastructure—productivity that is hard to match in a factory.

“We originally chose NComputing because of the significant cost savings and the solution’s ability to run our AS400 applications. The operational results have been equally impressive,” said Mr. Muller. “Our plant is a very unfriendly environment for computers, with brake hose dust everywhere. We’ve found the NComputing units to be extremely reliable—in fact, one of our stations was up 95 straight days without a reboot.”

IT-easy and eco-friendly

BLD also discovered that the time and effort required to deploy and maintain an NComputing-based infrastructure was much lower. “With just two staff members in IT support, we saved a huge amount of time when we deployed the NComputing solution. We only had to install a fraction of the PCs and connecting the NComputing access devices was a snap,” added Mr. Muller.

BLD also realized another benefit of NComputing—dramatically lower energy costs. “NComputing L-series devices only use 5 watts of electricity compared to 150-200 watts for a PC. We are improving the bottom-line and the environment.”

