

Gesca's Cyberpresse.ca More Productive with Zend Solutions

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“Overall, purchasing from Zend has meant our development team builds higher quality code, creating high value for us at a very low cost.”

Matthieu Delorme,
Chief Technology Officer,
Gesca Digital Ltd.

Customer: Gesca Limitée—wholly owned subsidiary of Power Corporation of Canada

Geography: Canada

Industry: Media Publishing

Challenges:

- Slow execution causing loss of readership
- Defects taking up valuable engineering resource time
- Unable to determine cause of errors occurring in production

Solution: Zend run-time production solutions

Gesca Limitée owns the Montreal daily newspaper La Presse, along with six other daily newspapers in the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. Gesca Limitée also produces television programming, publishes specialty magazines and books, and operates several Internet sites such as Cyberpresse.ca

Gesca Digital Ltd is owned by the Power Corporation of Canada.

Cyberpresse has been a Zend customer since 2007 and has launched an important content management system (CMS) application built on PHP (using a PHP-based digital publishing package called Nstein). For the CMS portion of their backend systems they use Windows Server and the Apache web server. Additionally, Cyberpresse uses a Windows Server, IIS web server, and Microsoft SQL Server backend for text mining purposes.

Deploying business-critical PHP is the norm for Gesca Digital's Cyberpresse site. For instance in the first minute of the Formula F-1 race, if they have slowness or downtime on their newspaper website, they lose readership for the entire weekend, which leads to direct loss of page views and a resulting loss of revenue from ads.

Cyberpresse deploys new functionality weekly, every 3 minutes new page edits are posted, and they have 80+ million page views/month. Critical publishing functionality is provided for their editors by this CMS. Cyberpresse IT staff time is limited and their chief technology officer, Matthieu Delorme, saw a way to reduce costs by implementing Zend solutions.

Challenges

Some of the challenges that Cyberpresse faced were slow execution, slow loading pages, and bugs that couldn't be found once the application was deployed in production. In particular, the 3rd party CMS digital publishing system that they were using was suffering from performance problems and buggy code, and the team at Cyberpresse had no insight into the PHP code that was executing in their production environment.

Cyberpresse consequently had low staff productivity and low site quality because of the problems they were encountering:

- Bugs that were hard to pinpoint; result: valuable engineering time used for debugging
- Performance bottlenecks; result: slow loading pages and consequent loss of readership
- Errors in production could not be found; result: lower-quality experience for readers

With over 30 servers in production use, their development and staging servers are locally managed by IT staff. Cyberpresse.ca has 9 frontend web servers on LAMP running PHP, including quad core and dual core blade servers from IBM and has 8 database servers, plus image servers, app servers, and staging servers.

Cyberpresse infrastructure is built by an IT staff that includes 10 PHP developers and their development environments run on VMWare – used to replicate their production stack. Their backend systems run on Windows, both IIS with Microsoft SQL Server, and Apache—consequently Cyberpresse has worked closely with Microsoft for their backend design. Their frontend is LAMP-based on a lightweight architecture; pages are pre-generated by the backend, with sessions and cookie data for user accounts all managed on the frontend.

Solution

By running the Cyberpresse system on top of Zend's web application server, Gesca Digital's engineers were able to rapidly and easily monitor and pinpoint issues as they arose in run-time and quickly get these resolved by their 3rd party CMS vendor support team.

Here is a sampling of some of the issues that the Zend web application server helped Cyberpresse identify and get resolved quickly:

- **“Caching has permitted us to optimize critical pages that we simply could not have made available otherwise.”**
- “Session clustering has facilitated the development of online features for us in a load balanced environment.”
- “Code optimizations we never could have achieved without **root cause analysis** because we were able to find and solve issues before they happened in production—in our weekly status meetings we estimate **this alone saved us many hours of coding.**”
- “Code was debugged and much higher quality **in half or less the time it used to take.**”

“Zend's production solution allows us to debug 10x faster compared to anything we had before.... With Zend optimizations, we have a home page that is over 2 1/2 times the size [it was 3 years ago] and we still have [the same] response time.”

Matthieu Delorme,
Chief Technology Officer,
Gesca Digital Ltd.

Result

“It has helped us optimize our code better,” says Matthieu Delorme, Cyberpresse CTO. “Better performance is due to bottlenecks being profiled, allowing us to perform optimization on the code... and recently we started using caching features with dramatic changes to performance. Zend's production solution allows us to debug 10x faster compared to anything we had before. **Overall, purchasing from Zend has meant our team builds higher quality code, creating high value for us at a very low cost.**

“For instance, we have had very active news stories... Like the Kostitsyn brothers (NHL hockey players) involvement in relation to organized crime, a story that was read by 150,000 readers on a regular basis, sustained traffic higher than readers of the new Obama administration stories, though when President Obama came into office we had a peak of 200,000 readers all at the same time, on noon of his inauguration day. Savings of time and increased productivity for both our production and development staff is immense.

“If we did not have the Zend production environment and Zend's supporting tools we would have had significant and costly bottlenecks. We are using Google Analytics to compare our traffic day to day, essentially this provides us with web page metrics. We additionally have statistics from Nagios – which provides us with hardware measurements and we then compare these two and can identify the enormous gains we've seen.

“For example, in 2005 our Home Page weight was about 200kb and had a response time of about 3 seconds. With Zend optimizations, we have a Home Page over 2 1/2 times the size at about 500Kb, and we still have a response time below 3 seconds.”



The PHP Company

Conclusion: Zend production solutions dramatically improve staff productivity and PHP web application performance, providing high value and rapid ROI.

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