

TO THE **FUTURE:** SHODEN DATA SYSTEMS



That much is abundantly clear when chatting with the company's executives. While it is by no means a single-vendor company, Shoden is the authority on Hitachi Data Systems (HDS) in sub-Saharan Africa. It's a position in which the company takes some pride: since 2000, Shoden has vested its confidence in HDS and reaped the rewards. Since storage will remain a central issue for data centre managers, the relationship between the two organisations is significant.

If there is one thing that remains constant in the tumultuous world of high technology, it has to be change. In the realm of storage, that change has centred around three major themes: the constantly expanding quantity of information, the constantly growing capacity of the devices that store it and the constantly increasing complexity of keeping tabs on data.

It is, agrees Trevenen, perhaps one of the most exciting times ever in the technology environment. "With connectivity, cloud computing and mobility emerging as the major trends in computing right now, and with more international links in place already, we're seeing pace of change like never before," he says.

With that pace of change, the requirement for storage solutions continues to escalate.

Says Mark Slade, Shoden's sales and business development director: "Our primary business is definitely in storage and predominantly based on technology from HDS. Through the years, it has proven itself to be a vendor that is at the forefront of solving the storage challenges that our clients face."

With a sound track record, what's on the agenda going forward? It is a mix of old (being the business principles that won't change) and new (moving into the cloud computing era). "Our core philosophy is to take 100 percent responsibility for solutions we provide to customers. That means understanding the business challenges, providing the products and technologies from the vendors we work with, the services and support that goes along with that," says Trevor Koekemoer, services and support director at Shoden.

It also means being ready to deliver to a customer base that is expanding into the African markets north of the border. "Many of our clients

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DETERMINE SUCCESS.**

WORDS **DONOVAN JACKSON**

In a meeting with *Brainstorm*, the first thing Marc Trevenen had to say concerned Hitachi Data Systems. "They've just announced the Hitachi Virtual Storage Platform. That's going to be huge."

Trevenen is managing director of Shoden Data Systems. The significance of his enthusiasm for the results of the Japanese vendor's research and development initiatives is that Shoden Data Systems was largely built on the sound value proposition for storage solutions that flows from Hitachi. It's a legacy that not only extends back a decade, but that will extend forward into the future.

are executing African expansion plans. They have come to rely on Shoden as an organisation that understands the data centre and can address the challenges faced,” says Shaun Barendsen, national sales and marketing manager.

APPLYING DATA CENTRE KNOWLEDGE, DISCIPLINE

Barendsen touches on something that is close to bone for Shoden Data Systems. The company is built on its data centre knowledge and discipline. That’s what has driven the additional solution sets that it has added over the years, including enterprise servers, data management and related storage capability, such as storage area networking and disaster recovery. “We understand the ecosystem that has to underpin business-critical systems; we have the skills on the various products and technologies, the spares and the reach to ensure optimisation, reliability and availability that is demanded from the data centre,” he notes.

Skills and experience have always played a key role at Shoden; that, too, won’t change going forward. “At inception, every one of our 11 founding members brought at least ten years of experience with them. We know that this is a critical resource: the intellectual capability of our people. That’s what sets us apart as a reseller, it is the key to adding value,” says Slade.

To this end, he points to the role of the Shoden Academy. It’s a niche IT training provider, unsurprisingly specialising in storage, systems development and foundations. The significance of the Academy, Slade continues, is that it ensures people development, both for internal Shoden staff as well as for its clients. “One of the major challenges that we face as a company, and which our clients face in managing their environments, is around the availability of people who have the skills necessary to support the data centre,” Slade notes.

Shoden’s headcount has grown to 135; it is likely that the company’s personnel requirements will continue to expand. Koekemoer adds that there is growing demand from Shoden’s customer base for the skills of its Advanced Services team, especially in terms of systems administration and storage administration capabilities. “We’re providing ‘stopgap’ skills to meet overflow requirements. That will become a growing line of

business, especially as our client base expands into Africa and there is the occasional need for additional manpower in the data centre,” he says.

On a similar note, Koekemoer notes that remote services provision is already a significant line of business and one that is set to grow. “And that too, requires trained, skilled engineers, something that we can depend upon from the Academy.”

As a company that operates in South Africa, Trevenen says Shoden is an enthusiastic participant in, and contributor to, Black Economic Empowerment. The Academy is one facet of its initiatives (see related stories). “We are a committed organisation that is aware of the social realities of our country. As such, we have

worked hard to achieve level 4 BBEE status as a value-add supplier. This allows clients that are procuring from us enhanced recognition status for their procurement spend, enabling them to claim 125 percent of their actual spend with us. Our BBEE status is also a clear demonstration of our commitment to making a difference through our business activities,” he explains.

CAREFUL GROWTH TO THE FUTURE

As Shoden continues to grow its business on the back of what can broadly be termed ‘doing the right thing’, Trevenen says key markets for Shoden Data Systems include the telecommunications, retail and financial services industries. Especially in Africa, he says, these are industries in which the company has a clear value proposition in the data centre. “It’s not flashy: we know the data centre challenges and we have a set of solutions and products to meet those challenges. We will continue to seek to expand our products and services portfolio on the basis of our philosophy to partner with selected organisations that can add value,” he says.

Continued growth, says Mark Slade, director of sales and business development, will rest on the Shoden principle of value creation. “That means continued investment in the development of our people and their skills, which play an absolutely central part in solving the challenges faced by our customers,” he says. “That’s something that doesn’t change, regardless of where the pace of change in technology may take us.”

Slade describes the company’s approach to growth as prudent and careful. “One of the big issues both now and into the future is the availability of skilled people. It’s an issue that is arguably even more pronounced in emerging Africa as it is in South Africa. As we look to support and enable data centres for our clients, we need to be sure that we have the skills and ability to second to these locations as required; after all, our reputation isn’t bound by borders,” he explains.

Says Trevenen: “We have proven to be a resilient organisation, having come through the recession unscathed aside from slightly slower growth; that, I believe, was as a result of cautious growth. To protect our reputation, it is essential that we have the necessary skills and capacity to meet our promises – and that’s something we will always ensure before looking to expand.” **B**

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MARC TREVENEN