

Business benefits:

- High performance — provides the speed and reliability to deliver 10 million e-mail messages a day
- Scalability — easily accommodates the exponential growth of today's e-businesses
- Low maintenance — offers ease of administration and low cost of ownership

What makes it work:

- Hardware: cluster of two Compaq *AlphaServer*™ DS20E systems with two 667 MHz EV67 processors and one *AlphaServer* 1200 system with two 533 MHz EV56 processors
- Software: Compaq *OpenVMS*™ 7.1-2 operating system
- Storage: Compaq *StorageWorks*™ RA 8000 system with Fibre Channel
- Services: Compaq Services for hardware maintenance

E-mail goes proactive

“It is in the e-commerce space that I see *OpenVMS* making a comeback.”

Eric Thomas — *Founder and CEO, L-Soft*

The need to communicate runs deep in the human species. It was so strong in Eric Thomas, then a 20-year-old university student in France, that one weekend he wrote software to facilitate electronic communication. What started out as a personal project in 1986 ended up as L-Soft — the world's leading provider of electronic mailing list and e-mail delivery solutions.

A privately held company, L-Soft (www.lsoft.com) is headquartered in Sweden but has its largest office in Maryland, U.S.A. L-Soft relies on the Compaq *OpenVMS* operating system and on Compaq *AlphaServer* systems to deliver some 10 million messages each day for an international roster of clients from the commercial, academic, and governmental sectors.

Using technology to help people

Thomas's goals in designing *LISTSERV*® software were to simplify e-mail list management and alleviate network bottlenecks between the U.S. and Europe. In 1986, the bandwidth between Europe and the U.S. was a skinny 19.2 kbps. Inadequate technology was standing in the way of a burgeoning social phenomenon — virtual e-mail communities. However, inadequate technology did not stand in the way of Thomas.

Eric Thomas, founder and CEO of L-Soft, explains, “I've always had a strong interest in technology and computers. What fascinated me with computer networks, and in particular e-mail lists, was the combination of technology with another interest of mine — human interaction. For the first time since the telephone, it seemed that technology would help people come closer to each other.”

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“We use *OpenVMS* because it works, and it scales. Scalability is everything to us. A client may start out with 10,000 subscribers, and within months grow to three million. If we can’t scale, we’re out of business.”

Eric Thomas
Founder and CEO, L-Soft



“*OpenVMS* running on *AlphaServer* systems is a safe bet.”

Gabriela Linares
Vice President of Marketing
L-Soft

Rising from ashes of mainframes

According to Thomas, in the early '90s many of the universities that used LISTSERV were phasing out their mainframes. Since LISTSERV was developed for mainframes, it was also threatened. “I had to do something because I didn’t want all this work to disappear,” says Thomas. “The whole point of starting L-Soft was to port LISTSERV to other operating systems — VMS, UNIX, and later Windows NT. I was unable to find a grant because I didn’t have tenure. Finally I decided to start a company because I had no other option left. Investors did not believe in me because of my age and engineering background. So I started L-Soft with my savings of \$3,000, and in 1994 it was incorporated in the U.S.”

L-Soft’s software includes LISTSERV, which manages electronic mailing lists, and LSMTP®, an e-mail delivery system that runs on Windows NT, *OpenVMS*, and Compaq *Tru64™* UNIX. In addition to licensing software, L-Soft has a hosting operation that runs almost exclusively on a Compaq platform.

Thomas credits L-Soft’s growth to a commitment to providing top quality service. “The first major customer for our hosting service was *The Wall Street Journal*. When we launched their interactive newsletter on our servers, we were keenly aware of the fact that mistakes were not allowed — period. And that was one reason to

choose *OpenVMS*. We felt much more confident in our ability to meet the customer’s needs. We’ve used *OpenVMS* since 1995, and it has never let us down.”

E-mail gets proactive

According to Gabriela Linares, Vice President of Marketing, “Our customers are looking for a way to communicate with their Internet visitors. They have realized that having a Web site alone is not enough. Because users do not have the time to go to their Web site every day, companies have to find a way to communicate with visitors and drive traffic back to their Web site. Our e-mail list software is a very effective way to do this.”

Companies often use LISTSERV for discussion lists that allow people to interact and exchange ideas. Linares explains, “At L-Soft we have different discussion lists for marketing, sales, and administration, for example. Since we are a technical company, we also provide open discussion lists where customers can discuss problems, exchange tips about the use of our products, and so forth.”





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Clients also use L-Soft e-mail lists for one-way distribution of news, both internally and to customers. “Our software has the ability to interact with a customer database and create spontaneous lists. For example, it can deliver a message only to people living on the East Coast of the United States. Another use of this database integration is to create personalized messages. For example, we have a customer that uses LISTSERV to deliver monthly billing electronically instead of printing bills out on paper and sending them through regular mail,” explains Linares.

Outsourcing, powered by *AlphaServer* systems

In an industry that is increasingly dominated by short, marketing-driven release cycles, L-Soft understands the importance of delivering powerful, dependable solutions. ListPlex® outsourcing gives customers access to L-Soft’s expertise and technology — without hardware, software, or personnel investments. With more than 10 million daily deliveries and over 21 million subscribers, L-Soft’s hosting services are by far the most popular on the Internet.

L-Soft’s hosting operation runs on a cluster of Compaq *AlphaServer* systems primarily running *OpenVMS*, which also interoperates with *Tru64* UNIX and Windows NT.

According to Thomas, many companies start with the hosting service because it requires no investment — in particular, it does not require hiring people. Some clients eventually license the software and bring their jobs in-house, while others keep the hosting service simply because it’s more convenient. While roughly 75% of L-Soft’s business is licensing software, the outsourcing business continues to grow.

More, more, more!

Thomas acknowledges L-Soft’s major technical challenge to be “More, more, more — we’re always pushing the performance envelope. This requires faster processors and faster I/O — all at a competitive price. This is why we chose *AlphaServers* for our resource-intensive, back-end servers.

“We are in the business of selling the fastest engine in the world,” continues Thomas. “We need the best performance figures in the world, so naturally we want to use the fastest hardware in the world. That has always been a reason to choose *AlphaServer* systems. This architecture had the fastest performance in the mid-’90s when we started, and it’s still the fastest platform today. It’s never let us down. Thanks to the reliability of *OpenVMS* on *AlphaServer* systems, we can focus on our own business — which I cannot say of other architectures.”

Scalability is everything

According to Linares, scalability is L-Soft’s competitive advantage. “There’s nobody else in the market who can offer the scalability and the performance that we do. Reliability and scalability are the foundation of our corporate image, and they are core strengths of *OpenVMS* on *AlphaServer* systems. *OpenVMS* running on *AlphaServer* systems is a safe bet.”





Thomas agrees. "Customers choose our products because they work and scale. We chose *OpenVMS* for the same reasons. Scalability is everything to us. A client may start out with 10,000 subscribers, and within months grow to three million. If we can't scale to their needs, we're out of business."

The other factor that the *OpenVMS* on *AlphaServer* architecture offers L-Soft is ease of maintenance. "This platform is very cost-effective for us, since it requires little maintenance. Most of our *OpenVMS* technicians spend more time managing other servers because our *OpenVMS* systems practically run on their own. And ease of maintenance translates into low cost of ownership," comments Linares.

Thomas adds, "Historically, we chose *OpenVMS* because it's reliable, robust, easy to administer, and has low maintenance costs compared to other systems."

Looking into the crystal ball

Thomas sees the market for e-mail solutions continuing to grow, especially given the exponential growth of wireless communication. This calls not only for high performance and reliability, but also for security — a unique strength of the *OpenVMS* operating system.

As the world moves more and more to e-commerce, it will be critical that companies have the high performance, scalability, and security that the *OpenVMS* on *AlphaServer* architecture offers. It is in the e-commerce space that I see *OpenVMS* making a comeback," predicts Thomas.

For more information

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