

Intel® ESAA Helps Canadian Retailer Win Government Contracts

Case Study Intel® Enabled Server Acceleration Alliance



MDG Computers Canada Inc. is the largest Canadian-owned PC manufacturer and retailer of desktops, servers, notebooks, LCD and plasma screen televisions.

Challenge

MDG needed to fast-track the certification of their line of desktop and server systems in order to compete in an upcoming enterprise contract with the Canadian Federal Government. The contract called for systems to meet a complex set of hardware and software certifications.

Solution

Using a system configuration guide ("recipe") provided by the Intel Enabled Server Acceleration Alliance (Intel® ESAA), MDG was able to quickly select, qualify, and pre-test the assembled systems to ensure compliance with Energy Star 4.0 and EPEAT Gold environmental criteria, as well as several software manufacturer certifications required to qualify for an upcoming RFP from the Canadian Federal government. Intel ESAA helped MDG conserve valuable engineering resources, speed their RFP submission, reduce their certification costs, and ultimately win a standing offer contract.

Intel® ESAA Recipe Used

Red Hat Enterprise Linux (RHEL) 5.1 – Intel® Desktop Board DQ35J0 with Intel® Core™ 2 Processor

Summary

The National Master Standing Offer (NMSO) contract is a nationwide high-volume purchasing vehicle used by the Canadian Federal Government for PC and server purchases. Contract awards do not come easily, as they require a high level of product certification. Multinational corporations such as Dell, HP, and IBM are among the stiff competition for contract awards, which become available for bid once every three years. For MDG, the risk of making a significant upfront investment in obtaining new product certifications, with no guarantee of winning a contract, was a heavy concern. Under a long-term plan, MDG committed company resources to meeting the specification requirements and leveraged their membership in the Intel® Enabled Server Acceleration Alliance (Intel® ESAA) to speed the qualification and certification process. This case study details how MDG used the Intel ESAA program to ensure a one pass approval approach in response to a stringent set of hardware and software standards.



The Challenge

As Canada's largest domestically-owned PC business, MDG was well aware of the high volume of systems procured through NMSO contracts. For many years, MDG was effectively locked out of selling to the Canadian Federal marketplace because of the high level of certifications required from manufacturers. While MDG has very high standards for quality processes and controls in the manufacturing process, the cost to obtain and keep up with a host of new hardware and software certifications throughout a product lifecycle was a cost-prohibitive endeavor, even for a larger manufacturer.

Undeterred by the challenge and eager to gain access to new markets and further enable their flourishing K-12 and higher-education business, MDG formulated a long-term plan to win a NMSO contract for PCs and servers. First, the issues surrounding certification needed to be addressed as MDG embarked on their plan to win placement on the NMSO solicitation.

MDG was introduced to the Intel ESAA program through an industry expert they hired to help manage their NMSO contract and product certification initiatives. "The Intel ESAA program is an essential factor in providing a compliant PC and server platform that is certified by a third party under the MDG brand name. This is a very important point since Canada will not accept a system on the NMSO contract, even if it is identical, unless the certification is made in the name of the manufacturer who submitted the proposal," said Brad Fry, environmental standards compliance engineer at MDG Computer Canada Inc.

The MDG team worked with all levels of Intel engineering support to qualify and develop a platform ready for certification. "We had numerous specifications we needed to meet, everything from ambient noise, physical security, to Energy Star 4 specifications. It is difficult to read specifications on your own and interpret what is going to meet a specific requirement," adds Fry. "That is where the Intel ESAA program steps in and provides unmatched expertise in qualifying and developing a compliant product that we could quickly bring to market and certify under the MDG brand name."

"The cost and infrastructure required to maintain the high level of certifications required by the Canadian Federal government is prohibitive for most independent manufacturers. The Intel ESAA program is essential for manufactures that need to offer desktop and server systems that are compliant with a high level of certification criteria."

– Brian Monette, President, MDG Computers Canada Inc.

The Solution

The NSMO office calculates price scores by evaluating performance, usability and total cost of ownership (TCO). MDG was able to utilize the features and support of Intel® products and the Intel ESAA program to improve their score in every category. With Intel ESAA engineering support, the MDG team was able to incorporate several Intel® Architecture features into a platform that enabled them to take advantage of pricing concessions set aside for certain security and TCO savings. First, MDG learned they would earn more evaluation points by using the Trusted Platform Module (TPM), a board-level component that provides a protected space for key operations and other security critical tasks. Intel® technologies like Intel® Active Management Technology (Intel® AMT) enhanced the usability and performances scores for MDG.

Taken together, the team calculated that the combination of features would cumulate into an evaluated price score that was below MDG's competition and would also offer a superior feature-set for which the Canadian government would give preference. "We could have taken the approach of proposing a stripped down system that met their specification at the lowest price point, but because of Intel's strengths in green technology and TCO reduction, it made sense to go in the direction of offering a robust system platform, because we were able to recoup our score with the green IT and TCO price preferences," said Fry.

MDG also needed to make sure their system platforms were Energy Star compliant and EPEAT registered. EPEAT (Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool) is an online resource developed by the EPA and managed by the Green Electronics Council (GEC) that helps institutional purchasers select and compare computer desktops, laptops and monitors based on their environmental attributes. EPEAT provides a clear and consistent set of performance criteria for the design of products, and provides an opportunity for manufacturers to secure market recognition for efforts to reduce the environmental impact of their products. For example, MDG's corporate-wide recycling program was another element that helped them receive a successful EPEAT manufacturer listing. For more information on EPEAT listings, visit <http://www.epeat.net/>.

"Meeting today's green IT standards and reducing a company's carbon footprint is not an easy task for any manufacturer, but with the support of the Intel ESAA program, it became something that was attainable for us."

*– Brad Fry, Environmental Compliance Engineer,
MDG Computers Canada Inc.*

Finally, the Intel ESAA program made it easy for MDG to demonstrate their system's software certification with a free listing on Red Hat's online database of certified hardware found at <https://hardware.redhat.com/>. Pass-through certification is an exclusive benefit to Intel ESAA members that allows third-party systems to be granted the same certification status as models previously certified by Intel Corporation. With their listing, MDG can demonstrate to their customers that Red Hat will provide software support for MDG's certified hardware. "Customers are more aware of the certification process and the benefits of purchasing a verified platform when it comes to receiving support from software manufacturers," says Fry. "We used to explain to customers why you need a certified platform when it comes to accessing support from a software vendor. Now customers ask for it and we see it in bids all the time, even outside of government. Small school districts and corporations are now careful to specify both hardware and software certification," said Fry.

The Intel ESAA Advantage

Ultimately, by working with the Intel ESAA program, MDG received top-notch support throughout the qualification and system development phase. It was "incredible," says Fry. "We didn't have a lot of time. This project was completed in a thirty day window that did not leave much time for remediation and re-testing if things didn't go well."

"Before [Intel] ESAA there was no avenue to cost-effectively support our desire to sell into the Canadian Federal government. Without the outstanding support of the [Intel] ESAA program we could not have won this key opportunity."

– Brian Monette, President, MDG Computers Canada Inc.

The long process of bringing a certified platform to market in response to Canada's NMSO contract was met with a successful contract award early in 2008. Now with the right set of certifications and the long-awaited NMSO contract in hand, MDG has access to new markets and revenue streams for many years ahead.

About Intel ESAA

The Intel Enabled Server Acceleration Alliance is a collaboration between Intel and independent software and hardware vendor members that enables resellers to deliver pre-tested, high-quality solutions based on Intel® Server and Workstation boards and systems. Membership in the program is a free benefit for Intel® Channel Partner Program members at the Premier and Associate levels.¹ To learn more, visit www.intel.com/go/esaa

About MDG

MDG Computers Canada Inc. is a Canadian-owned manufacturer, distributor and retailer of PCs, servers, notebooks and related products and accessories. The company was founded in 1991 with a single location, and now has 18 franchised locations across Canada, with headquarters located in Oakville, Ontario. To learn more, visit www.mdg.ca

For more information on the Intel ESAA program, visit www.intel.com/go/esaa

¹For more information on how to become a member of the Intel® Channel Partner Program, visit www.intel.com/cd/channel/reseller/emea/eng/membership/index.htm


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