

Every day, Outspot offers exceptional deals using Combell's Public Cloud

With more than 2.6 million members, Outspot is a market leader for 'daily deals' in Belgium and the Netherlands. Thanks to the group buying principle, partner companies offer incredible discounts on their products and services. Many unique experiences such as hotel or restaurant package deals, concert tickets or products can be the deal of the day. Traffic peaks are not a problem thanks to Combell's flexible Cloud infrastructure.

outspot.be

exceptional experiences • exceptional prices

Outspot developed very quickly: in just four years' time, the small start-up has grown to become a market leader. The Internet is essential in the current business model, confirms director Thomas Van Overbeke: "Out of a few dozens of online business concepts we have launched in the beginning, we decided to pursue three projects in 2008. The websites we have built back then were actually beta sites, which we used to see whether a concept works. We did not want to build a comprehensive site from the outset, and then be forced to admit that something doesn't work well. Outspot seemed to be the most successful concept, and so we kept investing in it."

"Our first deal went live in May 2009. We sold only five items, of which three to ourselves. For the second deal, we suddenly had 80 buyers. From there, everything flowed very quickly, owing to word of mouth and some successful contests, which help gain more exposure. Since then, we recorded a growth rate of 30-40% per quarter, in part thanks to the acquisition of Belgium-based PromoCity and Netherlands-based GoShareThis in 2012. In September 2013, we had over 2.6 million members in Belgium and the Netherlands."

"The most important thing in this business is to have sufficient critical mass of members. If you

THE CHALLENGE of Outspot

- Daily online flash sales
- Over 1.4 million unique page views per month
- Hardly predictable traffic peaks
- Over 800 simultaneous connections
- E-mail newsletters to over 2.6 million members
- Fast restore in case of problems

THE SOLUTION of Outspot

- Public Cloud hosting
- SLA Plus
- Virtualisation (VMWare)
- Varnish Cache
- Monitoring
- Managed back-up
- Wide range of IP addresses

THE BENEFITS OF COMBELL according to Outspot

- 24/7 monitoring and technical support
- Flexibly scalable infrastructure
- Best possible use of the server capacity
- Scalable during traffic peaks
- Complementary technical knowledge
- Excellent value for money

"Guaranteed uptime is important for us. Missing just one day means one deal falling through and one unhappy partner."

The screenshot shows the Outspot website interface. At the top, it says "De kracht van 2 miljoen leden", "35% tot 80% korting", and "Tot 6 maand terugbetalingsgarantie". The main navigation bar includes "Huidige actie", "Wedstrijd", "Wat is Outspot?", "Gemiste deals", "Hulp nodig?", and language options "NL" and "FR". A prominent red button says "KOOP NU!" with "Al 13 keer gekocht" below it. The main content area features a large deal: "Bescherm je woning tegen brand met een rookmelder, koolmonoxidemelder, blusdeken en brandblusser, incl. levering" for €49,95 (reduced from €85,00, a 41% discount). To the right, it shows "2.650.337 leden" and a search bar. Below the main deal, there are sections for "Andere leuke deals" including "Dagje zoo (Limburg, NL)" for €10,00 and "Out-spotprijs van de maand: iPhone 5c" for €59,95. The footer of the deal lists items: Rookmelder, Koolmonoxideverklikker, Blusdeken, and Poederblusser 1 kg.

“Varnish has made it possible to reduce the load on our web server, which has allowed us to continue to grow on the same infrastructure.”

do not have that critical mass, partners will not show any interest in your services. You also need to make things happen on a wide scale to ensure profitability”, says Thomas Van Overbeke. “We have been breaking even since 2011. We run a healthy company, unlike some of our competitors. We have a responsibility to both our staff and members. For them, it is vital that we maintain our financial health.”

Upgrading from Easyhost to Combell

In 2008, Outspot chose Easyhost. “At that time, it was the most interesting provider in Belgium, especially as far as prices are concerned. We wanted to test a few concepts on a very small scale. Finally, Outspot has been running on the beta site for over a year”, remembers Thomas Van Overbeke. “In 2010, we were about to reach the limits of what Easyhost could do for us. We then started rebuilding the whole site in close collaboration with the people at Combell, which has meanwhile incorporated Easyhost in its group. Together, we assessed our new needs. The best solution for us seemed to be to switch to a Public Cloud environment.”

The flexibly scalable Cloud infrastructure turned out to be the most secure and affordable manner for Outspot to be able to deal with the fast growing number of members. “In the Public Cloud, we are constantly upgraded”, continues Thomas Van Overbeke. “At the same time, we also made some technical improvements ourselves, in particular where our software could be more efficient. Combell played a very positive role in this context by pointing out a few errors we made. They gave us useful advice when an upgrade was absolutely necessary.”

“In early 2013, we were really about to reach the limits of our server. Back then, we also considered other options than Combell. We are a fast growing company, but we are also very rational about our recurring costs, as part of which hosting is a key factor. We want to be able to keep these costs under control. Combell offers us a very professional service at an affordable price. Quality is the main reason why we chose them.”

Outstanding customer service with CRM integration

For Outspot, customer satisfaction is the best way to stand out from competitors. “We invest much time and energy in the quality of our offer. By systematically going for attractive, first-class deals, we build long-term relationships with our partners and offer our members the best possible experience. An example to illustrate our extreme customer-friendliness is the six-month money-back guarantee for experiences. Customer support is also crucial, as it is for Combell”, thinks Thomas Van Overbeke.

Customers get support via three main channels: e-mail, phone and social media. “We are very busy with e-mail marketing. So, people e-mail us quite often when they have questions or complaints. We also have a helpdesk that people can contact by phone. And finally, we promote every special deal through social media such as Facebook. We get many questions via this channel too, and we answer them using the same channel.”

In order to guarantee the best possible service, Outspot has built a close integration between its transactional website, the management of relationships with partners, the actual sales and the management of members. “With over 2.6 million members, our MySQL database is fairly large, and a few optimisations needed to be implemented. Moreover, our website is not the only component that uses it: the entire system is concerned. Our sellers make a deal with a partner and prepare everything in the CRM environment. All the necessary settings, web text content and images are uploaded in the system. We developed everything in-house, without external software”, tells Van Overbeke.

“The deal then goes live and members make their purchase. The system generates all the vouchers automatically and partners can constantly monitor sales. When people went to a restaurant, for instance, the restaurant owners can send us their vouchers in order to be paid. Invoices are made out automatically and payments are made. In addition,

ABOUT OUTSPOT

Outspot is a market leader in Belgium and the Netherlands for ‘daily deals’, as part of which members benefit from huge discounts owing to the group buying effect. With over 2.6 million members, Outspot offers an effective marketing channel for providers of experiences such as hotel package deals, trips, restaurants and luxury goods.

For further information, please visit: www.outspot.be



Thomas Van Overbeke: “I am really happy I chose Combell. Their experts really know what they are talking about and you can speak to them directly over the phone.”

there are many control mechanisms for both reporting and our helpdesk. When people call us and ask a question, our helpdesk needs to have the right information available. The chain is completely integrated. The website is just one part of it, the rest is equally important. Everything is connected and runs on one single central environment, with only one database. If our systems or our Internet line fail, half of our employees find themselves out of a job.”

Powerful e-mail marketing engine

“For e-mail marketing, we used to have an external system, combined with an in-house mailing system. Now, we have integrated this in-house too”, says Thomas Van Overbeke. “Every day, we send out two to three million e-mails, which is not that easy to do. Many complex technical aspects are involved to make sure that Hotmail or Google do not move our e-mails to our members’ spam folders. We also need to see that people can unsubscribe easily, so that they do not receive unsolicited e-mails. The mailing system is now managed in Combell’s Cloud, on a Windows server. Our other applications are built using Linux and open source software.”

“The mailing software retrieves the contact information in the central database. A personalised newsletter is created for each member, including tailored offers according to the recipient’s residence. The whole bulk mailing operation cannot take more than two to three hours to complete. Otherwise, it would be too late. Three million e-mails a day is no piece of cake, but they are sent out without any problem. We also send out fewer e-mails to sleeping members or people who do not open our messages. If someone shows no interest, there is no point in constantly bombarding them with tons of e-mails. We also always do our best to make our newsletter as relevant as possible according to the members’ preferences and their behaviour on our site in order to keep them interested. Thanks to separate servers used for the creation of e-mails and the bulk mailing itself, we avoid ending up on all sorts of blacklists. We are one of the largest e-mail senders in our field. That is our core business. And that is the reason why I do not want to outsource it, although many others do it. We keep that expertise in-house.”

Caching vs transactional pages

When many Outspot members open their newsletter, the website has to deal with huge traffic peaks. Combell helps guarantee the availability of the site and reduce loading times using a caching system based on Varnish. “Some of our many deals can sometimes become extremely popular. When this happens, we are talking about several hundreds of simultaneous connections. You do not want to know what the limits of your server are, just when you are so successful. Missing just one day means one deal falling through and one unhappy partner. This is why guaranteed uptime is so important for us”, thinks Van Overbeke. “On top of that, we also need to keep a careful eye on costs. Combell helped us ‘stretch’ the current infrastructure and install a Varnish configuration on it. They already had experience in this area with similar sites.”

“We already used a caching mechanism, but that was not enough. With the help of a Combell specialist, we started testing and optimising our site step-by-step. The devil is in the detail. Sometimes, caching is not fully compatible with how we show things in real-time, such as geolocation. For example, each member receives, according to his/her post code, a different list of restaurants, sorted by distance. So, everyone sees another order. While you build such lists dynamically, Varnish displays static content. This is why, for instance, the text content is retrieved from the cache, but not the order.”

“We are currently very satisfied. Varnish has made it possible to significantly reduce the load on our server, which has allowed us to continue to grow on the same infrastructure. Whereas our Apache web server used to be the weak link, we are now trying to optimise the underlying MySQL database. Varnish does its job. Performance issues have been resolved and we can now get the very best out of our server.”

“Last year, we switched to an SLA Plus for our Cloud service. This guarantees us that we can get professional support from Combell at any moment. I can call them in the evening or at any other time: I always get in touch with people with

the right technical knowledge. When problems arose, Combell handled them in a very efficient manner and provided solutions in no time. Their experts really know what they are talking about and you can speak to them directly over the phone. Everything is going very well. Therefore, I am really happy I chose Combell.”

“If our systems or our Internet line fail, three quarters of our employees find themselves out of a job.”

“You do not want to know what the limits of your server are, just when you are so successful.”

More info about this solution?
Contact one of our account managers on
0800-8-567890