Fairway Independent Mortgage Corporation Builds Solid IT Foundation on Nutanix

Nutanix Cloud Platform Provides the Ease of Management, Scalability, and High Availability Needed to Deliver a World-Class Customer Experience

BUSINESS BENEFITS

By moving from Dell EMC Vblock infrastructure to Nutanix, Fairway Independent Mortgage Corporation was able to improve virtual desktop performance, while simplifying and automating infrastructure management. With faster application development and easier access to key applications, Fairway improved employee productivity, enhanced the customer experience, and rapidly grew the business.

> "Nutanix Cloud Platform is the technology foundation that's enabling us to survive and thrive in the highly competitive mortgage industry."
>
> – Jarod Hallmark, VP of IT Infrastructure, Fairway Independent Mortgage Corporation

CHALLENGES

Fairway is the largest privately held mortgage company in the United States. "A huge portion of our success is due to our great customer service, and our 'speed to response' is one of the core metrics that's especially important to our CEO," said Jarod Hallmark, Fairway's VP of IT Infrastructure. "To deliver on our service goals, we need to be able to provide the best, fastest, and easiest-to-use applications to all of our staff."

INDUSTRY
Financial Services

BENEFITS
- Reduced desktop login time from 2 minutes to <30 seconds, improving employee productivity and the customer experience

- Automated infrastructure management and provisioning

- Eliminated the need to hire extra IT personnel to manage the Citrix environment

- Shortened time to deploy new VMs from 1 hour to 5-10 minutes, increasing developer productivity

SOLUTION
Nutanix Cloud Platform
- AOS, including built-in hypervisor, AHV

- Nutanix Prism Pro

- Nutanix Calm

Applications
- Citrix XenDesktop and XenApp

- Microsoft Exchange, Microsoft SQL Server

Fairway originally launched its Citrix XenApp and XenDesktop service on Dell EMC Vblock hardware in 2014. Nearly all of Fairway's 8,600 employees use Citrix daily, including the company's corporate staff and several hundred loan originators. "At the time we deployed Vblock, we only had two IT admins supporting the entire infrastructure," noted Hallmark. "It was a huge task that required us to work weekends to keep up with all of the hands-on management and time-consuming upgrades that come with the Vblock platform."

Fairway is growing very quickly, according to Hallmark. "Although the Citrix deployment on Vblock was originally designed to support 1,500 users, it could only handle a few hundred at a time. In order to handle the growing workload, we were facing a forklift upgrade on the entire environment. That's when we decided it was time to look for a new platform for our Citrix deployment."

SOLUTION

Fairway started the search for a better solution for its virtual desktops in 2017. "We looked at several technology options, but only Nutanix Cloud Platform could provide the management simplicity and one-click upgrades that would eliminate the need to hire extra IT staff for our VDI environment," Hallmark said.

Fairway enlisted the help of a Nutanix sales engineer for the initial deployment. "There were a lot of 'gotchas' and pieces we needed to do in the right order to deploy our Vblock systems. It was so much easier with Nutanix—it only took three days to deploy eight servers," Hallmark reported. "The process was so simple that we can now deploy 20 servers by ourselves in the same amount of time."

In addition to moving its Citrix deployment to Nutanix, Fairway has migrated its entire production environment over to the Enterprise Cloud platform. Fairway now has approximately 250 Nutanix nodes across three different sites in Texas, including 2500 virtual machines for Citrix VDI. The company also has 500 VMs for its infrastructure and application development environments, MS Exchange, MS SQL, custom file servers, web servers, Active Directory, and DNS servers.

USING NUTANIX PRISM PRO AND CALM

Fairway was originally using Nutanix Prism for cluster and hypervisor management. They have since upgraded to Prism Pro, gaining the ability to perform automated optimization, proactive remediation, and operational automation of their Nutanix environment using X-Play.

Fairway is also using Calm, Nutanix's software solution that adds native application orchestration and lifecycle management to the Enterprise Cloud platform. Calm decouples application management from the underlying infrastructure–enabling applications to be easily deployed into private or public cloud environments. The addition of advanced application management to the Nutanix platform turns common tasks into repeatable automations that are easily accessible to Fairway's IT team, without giving up control across the infrastructure stack.

"There's a bit of a learning curve with Calm, but most of that effort is just understanding all of its valuable features," admitted Hallmark. "There's so much you can do with Calm, that a lot of people don't understand how powerful it is at first glance. Prism Pro X-Play is a bit more straightforward to use at first since anybody can do an automation without training. There really isn't any coding involved, so you can build things visually and have something up and running very quickly. Nutanix automation sets you up for success. They give you enough triggers and actions so you don't need to know the code, but they leave it generic enough that you can use your imagination on what you want to do."

NUTANIX™

CUSTOMER OUTCOMES

Higher Performance with a Smaller Footprint

"The Vblock implementation that was designed to support 1,500 users filled up two racks," noted Hallmark. "In contrast, Nutanix barely fills half a rack. Citrix is running a lot faster now on Nutanix. We're seeing much lower latencies, since the storage is closer to the application with hyperconverged infrastructure."

Management Time Reduced from 25% to 10%

"We used to have to look at multiple interfaces to manage and troubleshoot our legacy infrastructure," explained Hallmark. "As a result, our IT team was spending a lot of time managing that environment. Prism Pro provides visibility into our entire Nutanix environment from just one pane of glass. There's no way that we could manage a traditional 3-tier IT environment with just two engineers. It's not only possible, it's simple with Nutanix. The average time we spend maintaining our infrastructure dropped from 25% to just 10% after deploying Nutanix."

Virtual Desktop Deployments Reduced from 1 Hour to 5-10 Minutes

"We've already completed several virtual machine deployments using X-Play," said Hallmark. "We then use Calm to take that image and redeploy it as many times as we want with customizations. Virtual machine deployments used to take an hour with our legacy infrastructure. With Calm, it takes just 5-10 minutes. It gives us the ability to provision additional capacity very quickly, helping us deliver new applications much faster to the business."

Easier Troubleshooting Enables IT Team to Innovate

"Nutanix makes it much easier to narrow down the source of any performance issues," added Hallmark. "With the hyperconverged Nutanix platform, we don't have to hunt for separate storage blade problems, then look for server hardware issues, and finally check for software glitches to find a problem anymore. At Fairway, we don't have the luxury of having a separate ops team that spends all day focusing on system and application performance. With the centralized management we get with Prism Pro, our team can now spend their time creating new applications, not just monitoring existing ones."

4x Faster Desktop Logins Increase Customer Loyalty and Company Success

"In order for our loan officers to get their jobs done efficiently, they can't be slowed down by technical challenges," said Hallmark. "They couldn't do that with the two-minute logins we were experiencing with Vblock. With Nutanix, our employees can now access their desktops in less than 30 seconds. This allows us to provide a better user experience for our employees, which ultimately drives customer loyalty and the ongoing success of our organization."

Simple Scaling Eliminates Over-Provisioning

"Scaling is extremely simple with Nutanix since we have just one type of hardware and software to procure," according to Hallmark. "We know exactly how Nutanix is going to perform and what our footprint will look like. It's easy to determine how many servers are needed to support a certain number of users, with enough power, and networking. We don't have to buy an entire rack and build out a 3-tier architecture like we did with Vblock; Nutanix is a plug and play solution. After we put an order in to Nutanix, we can have an entire new cluster available to end users in less than a week."

Great Nutanix Support

"Nutanix has one of the best—if not the best—support organization in the industry, and I've worked with lots of vendors over the years," Hallmark admitted. "They are very responsive and friendly, they help me see new ways to do things, and they push me to stay on top of everything. One of the coolest things about the Nutanix team is that they listen to my ideas. I've been on calls with product managers where they've asked me to describe exactly how we're using the product so they can make any changes that will help us as well as others who are using it the same way we are."

NEXT STEPS

Fairway is using AHV, the Nutanix hypervisor, but some workloads are still running on vSphere. "We're looking at expanding our use of the Nutanix hypervisor in the near term, specifically for its build-provisioning piece, so our developers can spin up their own VMs," Hallmark said. "AHV is a far less complicated solution to manage than vSphere, since you can look at everything in one screen within Prism Pro. It will also be great to eliminate the licensing fees that come with the VMware hypervisor. Providing great service to all of our customers is the most important factor in our success," concluded Hallmark "Nutanix gives us the ability to quickly deploy applications to our sales force that make closing loans even faster and easier. Nutanix Cloud Platform is the technology foundation that's enabling us to survive and thrive in the highly competitive mortgage industry."