

Olam transforms agriculture business with Nutanix hybrid cloud

Using a Nutanix Cloud Platform, Olam improves the quality of produce and the sustainability of farming across the world

Olam is re-imagining global agriculture and food systems, using technology to create safer, more efficient and sustainable ways of operating. To deliver its goals, the organization needed to break away from the restrictions of a three-tiered infrastructure and move to a form of software-driven IT that could support a mix of private and public clouds.

Olam chose a Nutanix Cloud Platform, unifying management across clouds and gaining the performance and reliability for all its mission-critical workloads. The company, which successfully scaled the platform to support 95 percent of applications, is now driving its end-to-end digital transformation strategy using Nutanix.



“With Nutanix, we are digitally transforming the agri-business, improving the quality of produce and the sustainability of production while giving many farmers a first-time opportunity to improve yields.”

– Thiagaraja Manikandan, President & Group CIO/CTO, Olam International



“Thanks to the operational ease of the Nutanix Cloud Platform, we’re no longer spending time on managing infrastructure but looking at how we can drive Olam digital transformation goals and add more value.”

– Sachin Verma, Global Head of IT Infrastructure and Operations, Olam International

INDUSTRY

Agriculture & Mining

BENEFITS

- Helps drive end-to-end digital transformation strategy
- Ensures 99.999% availability and reduces IT incidents by 85%
- Increases server utilization to 70% from 20-30%
- Lowers infrastructure costs by 30%
- Enables rapid scaling of VDI to 1,500 employees in 3-4 weeks
- Gains 100% end-user satisfaction organization-wide

SOLUTION

Nutanix Cloud Platform

- Acropolis Software, including built-in hypervisor, AHV and Security Configuration Management Automation
- Prism Pro management plane
- Files scale-out storage

Applications

- SAP enterprise resource management (ERP)
- Microsoft Exchange
- Microsoft SQL Server and MySQL databases
- VMware Horizon
- Microsoft Skype

Today, Nutanix software ensures 99.999 percent availability and has reduced IT incidents by 85 percent. Server utilization has risen to 70 percent while infrastructure costs have fallen 30 percent. When the pandemic struck, Olam was able to react quickly through the Nutanix Cloud Platform, ramping up the virtual desktop infrastructure to support 1,500 remote workers, gaining 100 percent end-user satisfaction across the business.

CHALLENGES

Olam International (Olam) is a leading food and agricultural business supplying food, ingredients, feed, and nutrients to more than 25,000 customers worldwide. Headquartered in Singapore, the company, which employs around 87,600, defines its role as re-imagining global agriculture and food systems. For Olam, this means creating safer, more efficient and sustainable ways of operating using technology. Indeed, as early as 2016, the company identified the benefits of drones, robotics, artificial intelligence and machine learning software across the agri-business value chain.

Olam set out a bold end-to-end digital transformation strategy. It was based on multiple platforms, interconnecting the business, encompassing farmers, processing plants, logistics, and customers. As Thiagaraja Manikandan, President & Group CIO/CTO, Olam International explains, the strategy was a response to a changing world. "People are increasingly buying through digital channels, such as ecommerce and social media," he comments. "Plus, farmers are using smartphones to access knowledge bases for informed decisions on raising crops."

Olam banked its digital strategy on the cloud. It would remove the complexity of the traditional three-tier infrastructure that Olam had used up to now. It would also break down boundaries that prevented the free flow of data across Olam. The company planned to follow a hybrid cloud model that combined a private cloud for greater control over its business data with the large-scale computational resources of a public cloud. Mr Manikandan adds, "In essence, we wanted to abstract on-premises and public cloud IT and use software to run and manage workloads across a single architecture."

SOLUTION

After reviewing solutions from multiple vendors, Olam focused on a Nutanix Cloud Platform. Remembers Mr Manikandan, "With Nutanix, we could build a software-powered layer to easily support a hyper-scale multi-cloud infrastructure. It provided us with the IT to drive our digital strategy and take our IT to the next level."

Olam started with a three-node Nutanix hyperconverged infrastructure (HCI) to power its hybrid cloud while providing a multi-cloud management capability. Olam then proceeded to migrate workloads over to Nutanix, buying additional nodes as legacy hardware went end-of-life. Sachin Verma, global head of IT infrastructure and operations at Olam, says, "With every additional node, we saw greater performance and capacity. In the space of two-and-a-half years, we implemented more than 40 Nutanix nodes, which today support around 95 percent of our entire IT stack." The applications running on Nutanix include the SAP enterprise resource planning (ERP) system as well as MySQL and Microsoft SQL Server databases. Nutanix nodes also support a VMware Horizon virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI), as well as Microsoft Exchange and Skype environments.

To simplify management, Olam uses Nutanix Prism Pro, which automates common tasks and generates actionable insight. Mr Verma flags the one-click upgrade functionality as a key benefit. "It simplifies the entire process, be it a software or firmware upgrade, while the Prism Pro console allows you to manage your entire IT footprint through a single interface." Olam deployed Nutanix Files, a software-defined, scale-out storage solution, to support its VDI and to simplify the administration of file servers. "It helps us avoid having a single point of failure and creates a highly scalable, easy-to-manage file server stack," Mr Verma says.

CUSTOMER OUTCOMES

End-to-end digital transformation strategy

Olam is successfully re-imagining global agriculture and food systems, establishing more efficient and sustainable ways to deliver products and services in agri-business. The company's digital strategy is enabling new kinds of interactions with consumers and farmers through multiple channels. That strategy is built on a hybrid cloud approach with Nutanix providing the tools that can manage workloads crossing both private and public clouds. "The Nutanix Cloud Platform is an integrated technology play," says Mr Manikandan. "It's allowing Olam to unify its digital transformation strategy."

Ensure 99.999% availability and reduces IT incidents by 85%

Even though the architecture has to support operations across 70 countries, maintaining uptime 24/7 isn't an issue with Nutanix. The company is achieving 99.999 percent availability for its applications running on both private and public clouds. Furthermore, thanks to proactive management using Nutanix Prism Pro, the number of help-desk tickets compared to the legacy three-infrastructure has plummeted. "The reliability of our Nutanix Cloud Platform has resulted in an 85 percent drop in the number of reported IT incidents," says Mr Verma.

Increase server utilization to 70% from 20-30%

By eliminating standalone compute and storage layers, Olam has boosted resource utilization. Mr Verma describes breaking free from the average utilization rate of 20-30 percent around for three-tier infrastructures. "The beauty of the Nutanix Cloud Platform is you remove all that, and hence our utilization is never lower than 70 percent nowadays."

Reduces infrastructure costs by 30%

The move to Nutanix took a sizeable chunk out of Olam's IT expenses. The reduction in hardware costs, power, and cooling, as well as management time has lowered infrastructure spend by 30 percent. Not only is this a great figure to report back to the business, but it potentially frees up resources for further investment. The last point is made clear by Mr Manikandan. "You can focus more of your energy on creating a world-class infrastructure," he says.

Launched VDI for 1,500 in 3-4 weeks

The Nutanix Cloud Platform has also given Olam a new level of agility, made evident when COVID-19 struck, and many employees had to work remotely. “We were able to massively scale up our VDI on Nutanix to support around 1,500 employees in just 3-4 weeks,” says Mr Verma. The VDI ensured secure home-working at a critical moment, helping minimize the pandemic’s disruption to operations. “Employees across 35 countries had remote access to the data they needed to get through this challenging time,” he adds.

Gains 100% end-user satisfaction

The response to COVID-19 has gained Nutanix a lot of fans across OLAM. Indeed, people’s feelings towards IT have never been more positive, and the consensus is that technology is more supportive than ever. “There’s 100 percent satisfaction with the Nutanix solution,” states Mr Verma.

NEXT STEPS

Olam is planning to test both Nutanix Calm, a multi-cloud application lifecycle management framework, and Nutanix Era for database-as-a-service capabilities. These solutions are part of a wide-ranging IT roadmap that also includes edge computing for processing and storing data closer to where it’s needed. Mr Manikandan concludes, “Our digital transformation will continue with the support of our Nutanix Cloud Platform, with innovation powered by our dynamic HCI.”



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