Taiju Life Insurance Achieves Flexible Scale-Out to Avoid Over-Engineering

Nutanix Deployed to Offer Both Advanced Security and Ease of Use Sought by Financial Institutions

BUSINESS BENEFITS

- Separation of internet for advanced security environment achieved in a short time period of one year
- Significant time reduction in constructing environment compared to 3-tier configuration
- Reduced operational workload due to centralized management of repair and maintenance
- Faster web browser boot-up in VDI environment, with improved ease of use
- System updating achieved without system outage or advance notice
- Platform built to permit flexible and simple future scaling
- Reduced training costs

> **"With the construction of the next generation of systems in mind, we considered building a system that was scalable, resistant to change, safe and secure, and Nutanix was just the right match for us ."**
>
> – Kou Higuchi, General CSIRT Manager, System Development Department, Taiju Life Insurance Company Limited

> **"As we envisioned that the system will become more diversified in the future including a hybrid environment, this was the ideal choice also because of its ability to support flexible requirements."**
>
> – Yuya Hamaguchi, Section Chief of the System Planning Group, System Development Department, Taiju Life Insurance Company Limited

INDUSTRY
Life Insurance

CHALLENGES
- Improved security through Internet separation as recommended by the Financial Services Agency
- Construction of platform that can be easily scaled in the future to avoid large initial investment
- Implementation and deployment in a short time period
- New environment constructed with future migration to a new-generation platform also in mind

SOLUTION
Nutanix Enterprise Cloud OS
- Nutanix AOS
- Nutanix AHV
- Nutanix Prism

APPLICATION
- Citrix VDI
  StoreFront
  Delivery Controller
  SQL Server
- License Server
- Active Directory
- File server

"An integrated infrastructure stack is provided through software, so repair and maintenance can be managed centrally. The low hurdles to operation were an important factor in our choice."

– Yuki Agatsuma, System Designer of the Technical Group, Technology and Operations Headquarters, Taiju Life & I Technology Ltd.

"In a 3-tier configuration, all components must be individually designed and configured. We knew it was going to be difficult constructing a 3-tier configuration in the short time period."

– Takahiro Araki, Chief Engineer of the Technical Group, Technology and Operations Headquarters, Taiju Life & I Technology Ltd.

CHALLENGE

Taiju Life Insurance Company Limited, which underwent a merger with Nippon Life Insurance Company in 2016 and then changed its name from Mitsui Life Insurance Company to its current name in 2019, is aiming for further growth. As life insurance products become more sophisticated, the company is working on "growth in sales" through the sales staff channel and "growth in the direct writing field" through the supply of products to over the counter sales at banks, agents and Nippon Life Insurance. In addition, the company is accelerating its growth by "strengthening and improving the efficiency of the direct writing capabilities" and "strengthening the wholesale field". To support these strategies, customer-oriented business operations, strict compliance, human resource development and the creation of an energetic workplace are all key factors for Taiju Life Insurance. In terms of its system, in order to demonstrate synergy as part of the Nippon Life Insurance Group, the company is constructing an easy to use and secure platform that will strongly support improvements to sales strategy and flexibly adapt to environment changes. Moving forward, while aiming to prepare for digital transformation, the company's plan is to actively construct a new platform that will allow it to pursue a multi-cloud solution, among other goals.

Taiju Life Insurance is also working on security measures in accordance with the "Policy on Initiatives to Strengthen Cyber Security in the Financial Sector" published by the Financial Services Agency in 2015. "As part of this effort, we launched an Internet separation project in which the Internet is separated from our internal system that houses critical information," recalled Kou Higuchi, General CSIRT Manager in the System Development Department at Taiju Life Insurance. at Taiju Life Insurance. After considering all the circumstances, including the effect on operations, the company decided to adopt a network separation strategy in which a virtual environment is constructed on the server side, and the Internet environment is separated logically.

Initially, this project needed to be constructed in a short time period in order to be completed before the international sporting event that had been scheduled for summer of 2020. "Not only did it need to be constructed in a short time period, we needed to construct a secure VDI environment for thousands of people, so to avoid excessive investment from over-engineering, we wanted an environment that we could flexibly scale," said Yuya Hamaguchi, Section Chief of the System Planning Group, System Development Department at Taiju Life Insurance. The company had been considering hyper-converged infrastructure (HCI), which can be constructed in a short time period and flexibly scaled out according to changes in needs. "In a conventional 3-tier configuration environment, everything needs to be designed individually, and we concluded from the start that it would be difficult time-wise. But HCI works well for VDI, and we felt it could also be used in a future next-generation platform," explained Yuki Agatsuma, System Designer for the Technical Group of the Technology and Operations Headquarters at Taiju Life & I Technology Ltd.

SOLUTION

Of the HCI technology considered, the one that stood out was Nutanix Enterprise Cloud OS. "The infrastructure stack that includes virtualization, security, and network is provided through software, and we regarded highly the ability to centrally manage operational repair and maintenance," recalled Agatsuma. After comparing products from other companies and deliberating, the product with the most positive characteristics for Taiju Life Insurance was Nutanix.

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Specifically, the low barrier to operating the system, including one-click operation for scale-out and software updates, was mentioned as a favorable selling point. Another reason for selecting Nutanix is that it allows hardware to be selected without restriction. Hamaguchi said, "Moving forward, we are also envisioning further system diversification including a hybrid environment, so it was an ideal selection from the standpoint of supporting flexible requirements." Furthermore, "VDI has a high affinity and Nutanix scored points for having a track record of operating at a similar size of scale," said Takahiro Araki, Chief Engineer of the Technical Group, Technology and Operations Headquarters at Taiju Life & I Technology Ltd. In terms of costs, the hypervisor being provided free for up to a certain number of users was also greatly appealing.

For Taiju Life Insurance, which has migrated much of its internal platform to a VMware virtual environment, Nutanix AHV was also very interesting as a next-generation platform for future transition to the cloud for its internal systems. "We are aiming to construct a safe and secure system that is also scalable and adaptable to change as our next-generation system. So Nutanix matched our needs," said Higuchi. Before making its selection, the company confirmed the screen layout including the Nutanix Prism interface, and it concluded that features were plentiful compared to its existing virtual environment.

CUSTOMER OUTCOME

Currently, about ten nodes are deployed for a VDI environment used by thousands of users, and the various necessary components for operation of the Citrix VDI are run on Nutanix. In addition, features related to the VDI environment including License Server, Active Directory and file servers have been consolidated within Nutanix, with a total of more than 30 virtual machines in operation.

The project was completed in a short time period of about one year after its launch. Simple theoretical parameters including for virtual machine and virtual pool design were prepared in advance, and settings were implemented to reflect them. Acceptance testing in the field was conducted after only three months, and after another three months of tuning to improve ease of use of the VDI, the company launched the production environment. There is a rich amount of knowledge available for running VDI on Nutanix, and the fact that hardly anything needed to be done was regarded as a factor in the short deployment period. "With a 3-tier configuration, I think another two to three months of additional time would have been needed," said Araki.

There also have not been any complaints from users since the new system launch. "When the web browser is launched as a virtual app, it boots up in a short time. I have seen examples here and there of just web browser launching under similar setups requiring over more than a double of the time, and I hear stories of struggles to improve ease of use. By that measure, we have been able to construct a stable system that is easy to use," said Hamaguchi approvingly.

By utilizing Nutanix Enterprise Cloud OS, a substantial reduction in workload has also been achieved in terms of operation management. "Previously with scheduled operations such as regular version updates, we would have to coordinate with various departments, but this is no longer needed as we can complete these operations with just one-click," said Agatsuma. "No stop adjustments are required and since it is a one-click process, things are very simplified now. Work to replace nodes can also be done without shutting down the system."

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Taiju Life Insurance, which until now had constructed its virtual platform around VMware, has been able to migrate to AHV smoothly without conducting any special training. Previously when a failure occurs, employees had to confirm various administration screens dependent on the hypervisor and hardware, but now the situation can be understood by just looking at Nutanix Prism. Visualization has become simple with the easy to understand Nutanix Prism interface, and because neither advanced skills nor detailed training are necessary for operation, training costs can also be reduced. Support from Nutanix including individual workshops and technical assistance has also been appreciated.

NEXT STEPS

Nutanix has also been recognized as a stable platform in terms of both capacity and response, and moving forward Taiju Life Insurance is planning for its use in applications outside of VDI. For example, Nutanix will be widely considered for use as an internal cloud platform, including migration to Nutanix of single systems such as DMZ (de-militarized zone).

With the growth in use of cloud services, depending on requirements it may be necessary to construct private cloud environments using data center colocation. For this, expectations are being placed on HCI and its low use of space. "Compared to the space used in a 3-tier configuration, I think it's now less than half. Nutanix is bound to be an important tool as we move to a multi-cloud environment," said Agatsuma. Meanwhile, with the company concerned about greater cybersecurity risks, Higuchi said, "Security is an important area we must address moving forward, and we are also hopeful of solutions such as Nutanix Flow that achieve micro-segmentation on a virtual platform."

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