# Simplicity, Servers, and Securing Buy-In: Assa Abloy's Overnight Nutanix Transformation

*by Eric Phillips*

For years, I wanted to introduce hyperconverged infrastructure (HCI) into my organization. Making it a reality, however, wasn't as straightforward as updating my credentials or having a colleague support my decision. I had to wait for the priorities to align for the right people at the right time.

When a great idea gets rejected, that doesn't mean it wasn't a great idea. It just means you just need to try again under different circumstances. I knew it was the right decision for us, so I kept the dream alive. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I started out nearly six years ago as the lead systems engineer at Ameristar, a brand of ASSA ABLOY that specializes in fence and security solutions. I'm now the IT operations leader, focusing on infrastructure and using lean methodologies to refine processes and reduce both costs and inefficiencies.

Our IT department supports around 750 people and about 400 devices. We also maintain about 100 network devices. Despite this, our team consists of just eight people, including our director, an applications manager, a reporting analyst, and system administrators. We all have varied backgrounds, but these are the smartest, hardest-working people I've ever worked with.

Great people on your team make all the difference—but even a great team needs the right tools and framework to do their best work.

### Struggling to Stabilize Our Data Center

Our previous IT infrastructure left a lot to be desired. We had general stability issues, aging hardware, and slow access times for network resources. Two of our biggest issues were disaster recovery (DR) and too-long server reboots.

I'll never forget the time that one of our "pizza box" servers died, taking our CRM system with it. We had disaster recovery software, but it wasn't up to par. It took us about a week to restore the server, a week spent scrambling and calling in favors to every IT colleague we knew to get their insight into our DR

situation. We never wanted to repeat that experience.

Our second major challenge was operational. We had zero physical redundancy and there wasn't an active or passive failover. In the IT world, part of server management involves patching, updating, and restarting servers. When dealing with physical servers, the reboot process takes longer, and we were never 100% confident that the servers would come back online.

Since our maintenance windows were so long, our team had to do a lot of work after typical business hours. There was also more downtime to end users. It was frustrating for everyone, and I knew we needed a change. More than that, I knew exactly what type of change we needed.

**A Five-Year Campaign for HCI**

I've been a big fan of Nutanix for years. When I joined Ameristar and saw its existing infrastructure, I knew Nutanix would be a great fit due to its simplicity. VMware has been the industry leader in virtualization, and everybody's used it for a long time. But it requires a lot of skills and knowledge to feel comfortable in its management and operation.

Nutanix is different. Nutanix has its own hypervisor (Nutanix AHV) and virtualization platform, which makes it very easy to take multiple physical servers and pool their resources. And it's so simple that it doesn't require a week's worth of training to figure out.

Timing often plays a huge role in the process of adopting new technology, though. I'd pitched Nutanix twice during my first few years with the company, and my efforts were unsuccessful. Then our team got a new boss, Terry. He did an infrastructure assessment and concluded that we needed to invest capital in our infrastructure. That's when I pitched Nutanix again. This time, it worked.

I like to think that Terry was persuaded solely by my enthusiasm, but things were a little different this time around. Our division was moving more toward hyperconvergence anyway and Nutanix just made a lot of sense for our goals. We were on our way.

**Speed, Simplicity, and Servers: the Big Switch**

Nutanix provided us with some tools to assess our existing environment, such as storage and compute. They helped us determine how many nodes we needed, as well as how they should be assembled. Then I worked with their engineer to make some further adjustments to best suit our needs.

The first part of implementation was all about the physical hardware. Once that arrived on site, we simply unpacked, racked, and stacked. Then we moved on to the second stage, which was configuration with a Nutanix engineer. Within two-and-a-half hours, I was working on password documentation. After

that, we tightened up some other security settings, and we were done.

It was very easy to lay it in and get it configured and online. We started first thing in the morning and by the afternoon, I was trying everything out. I compared each new experience to the past—creating a new VM on the old platform would've taken me 10 clicks, for example; with Nutanix, I can do it in two.

> **What's the key to new #technology adoption and acceptance? A simple, intuitive user interface. #NutanixStories**

The Nutanix interface is just as intuitive as I'd expected. When you log in, you can immediately see if there are any issues and you can drill into the analytics quickly. That goes a long way when it comes to identifying an issue, or giving credence to something you suspect is wrong.

Our incident resolution time used to be more than five days. After we deployed Nutanix, our time to resolve average tickets began to decrease immediately, and I know that's directly related to this infrastructure change. Once our servers got out of their old "pizza boxes" and into this new private cloud, [Nutanix Array Networks](), their performance increased.

All of a sudden, we got more storage, more RAM, increased speed and responsiveness, and the ability to reboot and patch servers quicker. It drove down the amount of time we spent physically managing those boxes and gave us more time to engage with other projects, such as refining processes for incidents and requests.

Our cluster load balances itself, too. If one particular node is working more than another, it creates balance by moving a VM, or otherwise reallocating resources. Before we didn't have any of that at all.

**Supported and Secure with Nutanix**

We can now upgrade or move systems on the fly, or move them to another node if one needs maintenance. That opens the window of doing maintenance during the day, which was never an option before.

A lot of people outside of IT don't realize that many system changes have to take place outside of business hours, and sometimes well into the evening. Our new Nutanix system gets my team out of the office sooner and has made a huge difference in our collective work/life balance.

> **Is your #IT team working too many late nights? Use the right systems and #tech so your #IT team has a life apart from work. #NutanixStories**

Our old system was like driving an old, ratty truck: when we got in in the morning, we were never sure if it was going to start. That caused some anxiety among the team. Within a few weeks of using Nutanix, that feeling went away. We now know everything will run smoothly, and everyone can continue to work regardless of any ongoing maintenance.

We've also been pleased with Nutanix's support and the Nutanix community as a whole. I'm on some of their Slack channels, where users will throw out questions instead going through the main support route. It's informal and immediate, and you'll often see a Nutanix employee chime in with a suggestion or documentation. I've never had that sort of rapport with any other vendor we've used.

Nutanix does a great job of keeping their community engaged and involved. They invite some user group champions to participate in their Change Advisory Board, where we get special news or insights before it gets released to the general public. It feels like you're a part of the company as it evolves.

Working with Nutanix means working with a group of enthusiastic people who truly believe their product is changing your business—and it is.

### Preparing for Tomorrow

Right now, we're using Nutanix AHV and Prism Central, but our next steps are to take a deep dive into Nutanix Frame, which is their VDI or desktop-as-a-service (DaaS) offering. We have a lot of full-time and contract employees, so there's definitely a solid use case for Nutanix Frame.

When COVID caused us to deploy our workforce to work from home, we were lucky to have enough equipment to handle the need. But if we'd had VDI, getting everyone up and running remotely would have been much simpler. We could've provided everyone the same experience rather than giving people different computers of varying ages and operating systems.

The way our business is organized, I wouldn't be able to deploy that out of our own data center—we'd have to be out of a larger shared data center for the division. I can't wait to have exploratory conversations with our divisional teams to see how we can best utilize that solution.

### A Dream Come True

Nutanix completely transformed our data center. I don't have any doubts or concerns when it comes to accommodating requests like spinning up a VM quickly. Our IT team now has the capacity to accommodate and support these types of requests with little lead time.

**Securing buy-in for a new #technology can be a long road. Don't lose your enthusiasm if you don't get a "yes" right away. #NutanixStories**

Anytime you add on to your infrastructure, you typically consider long-term costs and operational expectations. In the past, there would be much more planning and discussion about capital expenditure for buying hardware or upgrading an existing system. But with everything sitting in that Nutanix cluster, we have no concerns about scalability. From an infrastructure and operational support perspective, Nutanix has been everything I wanted it to be.

It may take some time for the right values, goals, and teams to align and point to a singular solution. But that alignment is key to securing buy-in, and by being patient, you can gain access to a world of possibilities. I kept the dream alive and finally saw it come to fruition.