



Auto Europe Relies on Nutanix During Covid-19 Pandemic

Nutanix Cloud Platform Enables Global Automobile Rental Broker to Support Remote Workforce and Find Time to Innovate During Travel Industry Shutdown

Nutanix has enabled Auto Europe Group to quickly transition to a fully remote workforce using virtual desktops. The Nutanix solution has also improved system performance, simplified management, and enhanced disaster recovery. In addition, hypervisor licensing costs were eliminated with the move from VMware ESX to Nutanix AHV.

“Nutanix has given us the easy scalability, performance, agility, and resilience we need to survive and innovate, even during a worldwide pandemic.”

- Karen Schaffer, CMO/CIO/VP of eCommerce, Auto Europe Group

CHALLENGES

Auto Europe Group is the global leader in international car rental services, helping travelers find the perfect vehicles for their trips at almost any place in the world. The company's eCommerce website enables consumers and travel agents to search and compare rates across all leading car rental providers, giving them access to a wider range of rates and offerings than relying directly on a single brand. Auto Europe now serves travel agents and brokers working at 24,000 car rental locations in 180 countries across Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, North and South America.

INDUSTRY

Transportation, ECommerce

BENEFITS

- Gained the performance and scalability needed to deploy virtual desktops
- Simplified Infrastructure management

SOLUTION

Nutanix Cloud Platform

- AOS Software and AHV Hypervisor

Applications

- Citrix VDI Virtual Desktops



Lacking Scalability and Performance for VDI

Auto Europe made the decision to deploy virtual desktops to its workforce in 2013. “We were looking for a way to move off of our existing terminal services to VDI, and to improve system performance for our remote call centers in Munich, Sydney, and Lisbon,” explained Karen Schaffer, CMO of eCommerce at Auto Europe Group.

“One of the biggest problems we had was trying to manage the old model of infrastructure consisting of a traditional SAN and multiple ‘big iron’ systems,” explained Peter Doyon, Auto Europe’s IT Director. “Scaling that environment was almost impossible. Adding new server infrastructure meant we had upgrade all our fibre switches or the entire SAN, and the older nodes were usually incompatible with the newer ones. We needed a solution that would enable us to incrementally stack on nodes and expand out quickly as needed.”

SOLUTION

Auto Europe purchased its first Nutanix systems in 2013. They started with a 4-node block deployment to successfully test the VDI infrastructure, and the environment grew quickly from there. All enterprise workloads are now running on Nutanix, except for a legacy booking system that is currently being decommissioned. The application development team is also working on a Kubernetes rollout running on Nutanix.

The Nutanix Enterprise Cloud infrastructure currently supports 660 VDI users with 42 TB of storage. Auto Europe’s IT team used Nutanix Files to move everything over from the NetApp SAN, including all user data, file shares, profile data, shared systems, web and application servers, system logs, and more. “We have completely done away with our old NAS storage. NetApp has been decommissioned in our environment and everything is now on Files,” confirmed Doyon.

Moving from ESX to AHV

After deploying the virtual desktops, Auto Europe transitioned from its VMware ESX environment to AHV, the Nutanix hypervisor. “When Nutanix announced they were releasing AHV, we jumped on the chance to become one of the first companies to deploy it in a production environment,” said Doyon. “AHV does everything we need it to do, and we were more than happy to quit paying the VMware licensing fees.”

CUSTOMER OUTCOMES

Easy Scalability

When asked what the number one benefit of moving to Nutanix was for Doyon and his team, he cited easy scalability. “Things can change very quickly in our industry,” said Doyon. “When a new contract is signed, we need to be able to boost the capacity on a cluster very quickly. In the old environment with our big iron and NAS systems, we’d be facing up to six months to get things deployed. Scaling is fast and simple with Nutanix. Now it’s just a phone call to Nutanix to place the order, we get another block in a day or so, and in less than two weeks it’s rolled out into production.”

Simplified Management

The second greatest benefit of moving from the 3-tier environment to Nutanix was the ease of management of the hyperconverged environment. “In the past, we would have to schedule maintenance windows to do any upgrades,” Doyon shared. “The Nutanix upgrades are transparent, so they’re now ongoing, all of the time. That’s a blessing for our IT team, especially with the 1,500+ virtual systems we have running. It was tough to juggle all of those maintenance tasks around without impacting the performance of all of our critical eCommerce systems.”

The Ability to Support a Remote Workforce

“Having the virtual desktop and Nutanix infrastructure in place has given us the flexibility to transition seamlessly to a completely remote workforce,” said Doyon. “Had we not been forced into going 100% remote so quickly because of the pandemic, we probably wouldn’t have done it this soon. We were completely convinced it would be more of a daunting task than it ended up being with Nutanix. The process was seamless, and we were able to switch everyone to remote desktops running on Nutanix in a matter of days.”

Better DR and Failover

Auto Europe relies on a core datacenter with five separate Nutanix clusters, replicating all data on the systems nightly to a secondary datacenter for failover. The company’s IT team is now preparing for a move from its existing data center to a newer facility. “We are snap mirroring between our Nutanix clusters so we can quickly restore that infrastructure,” Doyon explained. “Failover is a very simple process with Nutanix.”

Excellent Support

“Nutanix support has been exceptionally good,” said Doyon. “They have always been able to answer our questions and resolve any issues very quickly. Because of COVID-19, it isn’t always easy to get parts shipped in a timely manner. Even during the pandemic, when I order new hardware from Nutanix, it gets here faster than I can get over to the data center to move it into production.”

Faster Performance Improves the Customer Experience

“We are an eCommerce company that operates 24x7 call centers,” explained Schaffer. “We offer service around the world – there are 43 global versions of our website out there in our local markets. When we get a request from a client or a travel agent, we go out to all suppliers in real-time and get rates back to the customers as quickly as possible. We also respond to questions and issues from customers both prior to renting as well as during their rental. The speed of the network and response is vital to our success from a customer service standpoint. Nutanix provides the performance we need to respond to our customers quickly, improving the online experience and increasing customer loyalty.”

NEXT STEPS

“When the pandemic started early this year, we were anticipating maybe a three- to six-month slowdown, but now it looks like it will remain slow until late 2021 at the earliest,” said Schaffer. “We’re lucky that we’re a global company. While the North American and Australian markets are pretty much at a standstill, we are down only about 20-30% in domestic Europe from last year.”

“Unlike a lot of other companies in the travel industry, we don’t have many physical assets—like cars or planes—that are sitting idle when business is slow,” Schaffer commented. “Our assets consist of our technology infrastructure, as well as the people who provide our customer service. Because of the slowdown caused by COVID-19, we did close some of our smaller remote offices permanently and are now looking to see how we might change our physical footprint in our four main call centers.”

“Summer is normally our busiest season, where we’re focused on just keeping our eCommerce site up and running efficiently,” Doyon said. “Despite the enormous challenges COVID-19 has presented to our company this year, it has also given us a little bit of time to catch our breath and launch some technology projects that we had been putting off due to the lower demand for rentals. We’re now getting ready to launch a fully redundant active-active datacenter in Europe to increase overall capacity so either data center could run the entire company in the event of an outage.”

“Since we never know how fast the business is going to grow, quick scalability is the key to our success. With our old infrastructure, expansion was extremely slow and painful. It could take six months to a year to get the capacity up to where it needed to be. Nutanix has given us the easy scalability, performance, agility and resilience we need to survive and innovate, even during a worldwide pandemic,” concluded Schaffer.



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