Finding a New Comfort Zone: the Move To HCI

by Scott Zemke

There's always a sense of urgency and excitement around the latest and greatest technology, but early adopters are always going to be in the minority. The majority of people are often afraid to try new things. There's comfort in the familiar, even if the familiar option isn't the best one.

But the familiar can end up holding you back in many different ways. The tighter you hold on to what you know, the less likely you are to see new opportunities for improvement and growth. This was the case for our team at [Airetech Corporation](#).

The Writing Was On the Wall

Airetech began in 1981 as a manufacturer's representative of commercial and industrial heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) sheet metal products. Within a few years, our company expanded to include commercial and industrial mechanical HVAC equipment, as well as NEBB-Certified Air and Water Balance services. Today, we represent more than two dozen nationally known sheet metal and mechanical HVAC equipment manufacturers in Arkansas and Oklahoma.

> **There's comfort in the familiar. But staying with what you know can limit opportunities for growth. #NutanixStories**

I came to Airetech about a year ago, after spending 11 years working in various IT roles in the public sector. When I started here as IT director, It didn't take me long to figure out where the problems were—and where we could find opportunities.

We had some VMware host environments that were around eight years old and at the end of their life cycle. We were running out of storage and our systems were sluggish. We were constantly in danger of losing a drive due to its age, and we had to rebuild the drive arrays frequently. If we switched one off, we weren't certain whether it would come back online, and we had to be careful what we stored on the arrays.

Our systems were starting to fail. It was time to either replace our existing infrastructure with the latest version of itself or completely swap what we had for a better solution.

The Cost of Doing Nothing Vs. The Cost of New Equipment

Cost was definitely a big factor in deciding how to proceed. Replacing our old equipment could get expensive, and fast. But I couldn't ignore the fact that this was a golden opportunity to give hyperconverged infrastructure (HCI) a try.

Moving our IT operations to HCI would simplify our processes and hardware setup. We'd benefit from having a more hands-off network and less equipment in the rack, and everything would run much faster.

From an IT perspective, shifting to HCI was a no brainer. I was confident that HCI did everything that I needed it to do, so I wasn't afraid to break with convention and adopt something new. The possibilities were endless and the price was right. Management, however, couldn't see under the hood and they didn't realize how bad things were. From their point of view, everything was operating mostly fine. I'm a one-person IT team, so I had to convey the urgency of the situation on my own.

I got some help with that from our hardware. We had a couple of close calls where our hardware nearly failed, and it became clear that the problems were very real. We underwent an internal audit, and everyone finally understood that we were on borrowed time with our existing server infrastructure.

After that, it was pretty easy to convince the rest of the executive team that an upgrade was in order. Our cost-benefit analysis conversations were simple. Continuing on our existing path was going to cost us X, and switching to a new solution was going to cost us Y.

Y ultimately ended up being cheaper and had greater benefits. Our Y was Nutanix.

Making the Unfamiliar Familiar

I began the campaign for Nutanix shortly after I'd arrived at Airetech. I'd seen Nutanix in action at a previous employer and continued to follow the company over the years. When I walked in the doors and saw the situation before me, I immediately thought Nutanix would be a good fit. Four months later, I got the green light on the project and I hit the ground running.

Some of my IT colleagues thought I was taking a huge risk with Nutanix. They thought I should've chosen a solution that had been on the market longer and therefore had a longer track record of success. I'll concede that Nutanix is still the relatively new kid on the block, but I devoted some time to learning the ins and outs of the platform and didn't have any doubts at all.

Through my willingness to push myself and broaden my horizons, I learned that Nutanix gave me everything we needed above and beyond VMware. Once I discovered this, there was no turning back.

Seamless Implementation and Migration

We worked with Nutanix to right-size a solution for Airetech, and the implementation and deployment phases that followed were pretty simple. After we placed the order, Nutanix took the ball and ran with it, installing both hardware and software.

Migration was a breeze. Essentially, all I had to do was point and click. It took about a day to complete the migration for each of our three locations. One of the best parts about the implementation and migration was that there were no disruptions for our users when moving from one system to the next. They have noticed an impact, though: the network is much faster now, and there's less down time. Our storage space has also increased.

We're using Nutanix AHV and Nutanix Files, and running everything on HPE ProLiant DX appliances. We've got a couple of SQL servers and several file shares; most everything revolves around building plans and mechanical drawings, and we now have a way to share those files easily. Coming from a VMware legacy system where things were not always as easy as they could have been, I appreciate Nutanix's ease of use that much more. It takes fewer clicks to get the same job done.

Time to Set It and Forget It

With the brand new equipment, we've taken a quantum leap in both processing power and space. We went from approximately 20 terabytes to about 70 terabytes.

The increase in system visibility has been a game changer as well. Since I'm the only one in the IT department, I used to spend a lot of time feeding and caring for the hardware and equipment just to make sure it was running properly. I don't have to do that anymore. I get alerts if something is amiss, but Nutanix is proactive, and will often correct the situation itself.

Nutanix has given me my weekends back. Having visibility into each virtual machine (VM) has freed up my time. I don't even log into the Nutanix dashboard every day; I might check in once a week or so. I don't have to worry about the small stuff anymore. It's very much a "set it and forget it" solution.

What's more, we now have reliable backups. Before Nutanix, our backup system was a hodgepodge of copies housed in two separate locations. It was hard to tell what data was where. What made it worse was that some of those copies were unusable. Our disaster recovery (DR) was a disaster unto itself.

> **There's a confidence that comes along with having a solid DR plan that you can't get anywhere else. #NutanixStories**

Now, we have redundancy and complete replication of all of our sites to one another. If one site burned down tomorrow, it would just take a couple of clicks to restore everything. There's a confidence that comes along with having a solid DR plan that you can't get anywhere else. We have all the things that were missing from our previous setup.

Stability and Unparalleled Support

Nutanix differentiated itself from its competitors in terms of both performance and ease of licensing. Our previous licenses increased in price and complexity every year. With Nutanix, we were able to zero in on what we needed and lock in our costs for the next five years. That has increased our financial stability and made planning much more predictable.

There's a personal element to our Nutanix story that can't be underestimated. Calling tech support is infinitely better than I've ever experienced with any other provider in every aspect. The Nutanix sales team was with us from the beginning, and they still call me regularly to check in and see how things are going. It's completely unlike some other vendors that drop off the radar after your initial purchase—only to hear from then again upon renewal.

> **You can put a price on hardware and software, but there's an intangible value in ongoing support that matters so much more than you'd think. #NutanixStories**

Nutanix isn't just selling us an HCI solution, they're genuinely invested in our success. You can put a price on hardware and software, but there's an intangible value in ongoing support and connection that matters so much more than you'd think.

There's a reason why their NPS score is so high, and they live up to it day in and day out.

Finding Comfort in Uncertainty

There's a saying that nobody ever got fired for buying IBM. The same goes for VMware. It's a safe solution, sure, but sticking with what's safe can prevent you from seeing something better. Sometimes you have to take a chance to find what's best for your team and your organization over the short- and long-term.

Being the ultimate decision-maker when it came to pivoting to HCI, I felt the responsibility to get it right the first time. I knew Nutanix offered everything we needed at a better price than its competitors, and I ran with it. Nutanix far exceeded our expectations in the best possible way, and I definitely want to implement Nutanix at any new locations for easy management insight.

In the end, moving to HCI was much easier than anyone imagined. We transitioned from our old comfort zone into what is, ironically, a much more comfortable place.