

Smartbox Improves Gift Experience with Nutanix

Retailer Invests in Hyperconverged Environment for Control and Innovation

How does a leading gift retailer improve the overall experience for its customers while growing its business? For Smartbox, a provider of unique gift experiences to over 10,000 outlets across 11 countries in Europe, the answer was to expand its relationship with Nutanix, a leader in enterprise cloud computing solutions. Smartbox's implementation of Nutanix AHV and Nutanix Beam has resulted in a reduction in its data centre footprint, while improving overall visibility and control of resources.

CHALLENGE

Today's retail environment is a particularly challenging one for IT: systems must be highly scalable depending on the season, websites must be secure and always available, and customers want tailored digital experiences across all channels. Ideally, a retailer needs complete control over its environment and the associated costs while giving its developers freedom to innovate and deploy solutions quickly.

"We needed to be able to see what is happening across both the data centre and the cloud but also to be able to manage this from a cost perspective," says Paul Cash, Director IT Operations at Smartbox. "And we needed to be able to let our software engineers develop freely without them having to worry about resources and capacity. But the traffic that we have across our websites is very seasonal, and it shifts dramatically between the Christmas and New Year period. The business model changes too: our business model on the run-up towards Christmas is very much a buyer model where somebody will purchase one of our products and give that as a gift to a person that we'd call a beneficiary."

INDUSTRY

Retail

CHALLENGES

- Needed single visibility across cloud and on-premise
- Developers required resource capacity
- Seasonal demand fluctuated

SOLUTION

- Nutanix HCI
- Nutanix Beam
- Nutanix Era
- Nutanix Prism Pro

BENEFITS

- Complete view of infrastructure real estate
- Predict costs and model future requirements
- Full visibility of resource consumption

“So post Christmas a lot of these beneficiaries will unwrap the gift that they received for Christmas and then start to look at different areas within our websites. And that in itself triggers different flows. When that shift happens just after Christmas, it puts an awful lot of demand within our infrastructure and we need to be able to scale.”

SOLUTION

To address these challenges, Smartbox invested in a hyperconverged environment from Nutanix that married the best of its on-premise IT systems with public cloud services to be more nimble and quickly adjust to customers' needs. Its base requirements included the need for full visibility across all IT assets and services, advanced data analytics, the ability to control cloud usage and to scale-out DevOps. Some elastic workloads, like the e-commerce storefront, were moved to Amazon's AWS public cloud, enabling seamless scaling up and down depending on demand.

Smartbox is also using Beam to keep public cloud costs in check, which was often 30 to 40% higher than budgeted before the deployment. With Beam, the IT team can now utilise a charge-back model to show each department the actual cost of the IT they consume. Additionally, Nutanix Era has helped Smartbox simplify databases and management solutions across many websites, while Prism Pro supports automated infrastructure management, all to drive more flexibility.

RESULTS

Cash says the most significant benefits from a management point of view is that Smartbox now has a complete view of the company's estate.

“When we're discussing our product roadmap and what our capacity needs to be in the future, we can predict cost, and model how it's going to look all the way through from ideation through to production,” he says. “And it benefits the business insofar as IT is not seen as a blocker. Instead, we can accurately predict what is needed and start to build the platform and the road of the future so that while the coding is going on, all the infrastructure is readily available. Our time to market is quicker.”

Cristiano Adamoli, Data Centre Engineering Manager at Smartbox Group, says the Nutanix solution has allowed the company to transform its database lifecycle management.

“We have a very complex mixture of database engines which of course require different skills across our personnel and different management techniques. Having a single point of central management for all those products has helped us greatly. Beam also gives us full visibility on our current resource consumption. We can present to our internal customers how many resources they are using and how much they cost. We can also do a real-time analysis to compare costs between the public cloud and on-premise solutions.”

NEXT STEPS

Looking ahead, the company plans to leverage its Nutanix software investment tools to deliver self-provisioning of IT resources across the business. It is working to create an environment where its developers can spin up changes to its sites, add promotional offerings, and create new products, without having to wait for IT to approve requests. Smartbox believes this will allow it to more proactively act on business opportunities and more easily adapt to customers' needs.

"My work is a lot easier now compared with the past," says Adamoli. "I know there are solutions to migrate workloads from legacy systems that we still have to move to our new platform. And we know we can reach out to Nutanix and ask them for support. And they will tell us what we're looking for, either that it's already available or it's in their roadmap."

Cash says for Smartbox to be competitive in the marketplace, it is not just about the offerings that it gives to customers or beneficiaries. It's also to all of the tens of thousands of partners that it has scattered across Europe.

"We want to be able to provide our partners with the best possible platforms whereby they can sell to potential customers," he concludes.



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