Thanks to an agile IT team and Citrix, Aptronics is golden
ICT provider changes its technology landscape with Citrix

Gauteng means ‘place of gold’. This, the smallest of the South African provinces, features picturesque vistas, a world-class wildlife refuge and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The province is also home to Aptronics, a leading South African information and communications technology (ICT) solutions provider. After weathering a hard year dealing with a global pandemic and a companywide shift to remote work, Aptronics is golden – in part thanks to a Citrix-based hybrid cloud solution.

A lockdown in South Africa and a swift Citrix deployment

Before the first quarter of 2020 had even ended, South Africa was subject to one of the world’s earliest and most strict COVID-19-related government lockdowns. “Our suite of Citrix technology enabled us to seamlessly and securely carry on serving clients,” says Jacques Bodenstein, Lead, Compute and Platform at Aptronics. “By building a highly flexible hybrid cloud environment including Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops, Citrix Cloud, Citrix SD-WAN and Citrix Analytics, remote employees now securely work in the ways that suit them best.”

Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops gives workers the app and desktop experience they need to succeed – on any device over any network. A leading industry analyst characterizes the Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops service in Citrix Cloud as “a unified platform that allows for rapid innovation and the introduction of new features biweekly or monthly.”

“Today, Citrix technology enables Aptronics to deliver an even better employee experience than workers had at the office,” Bodenstein relates. “A better employee experience ultimately translates into better customer service.

“When it was all said and done, we had almost zero business impact from transitioning employees to a work-from-home model,” Bodenstein elaborates. “The reason for that is simple: Citrix technology works.”
Go big and go home

Before the pandemic, 30% of Aptronics employees worked on desktop computers and most staff members were not equipped to work outside the office environment. The pandemic forced the company’s IT team to plan, design, test and implement a work-from-home technology platform secure enough to protect its crucial data and applications. What’s more, it accomplished the implementation and transition within the space of two weeks.

Citrix Cloud is evergreen

Citrix cloud services was rapidly deployed and that implementation delivered a number of crucial capabilities to the business. “There are no hidden costs for upgrades with the environment,” Bodenstein states. “Everything is evergreen.

“Citrix gives us the choice of running either a hybrid or comprehensive cloud environment. We can run a host of different workloads, and Citrix cloud services supports them all,” he continues. “We were able to repurpose existing endpoint devices, so that we could easily and economically access our data through Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops,” he explains.

“With Citrix Cloud as the control plane, we get great manageability,” Bodenstein says. “Our hybrid cloud solution - which includes our own private cloud - increased uptime and mitigated disaster recovery concerns. Now, Citrix is woven into our business continuity strategy.”

Once the hybrid cloud environment and the Citrix Cloud management plane were up and running, the Aptronics IT team focused on ensuring that analytics tools were in place to flag suspicious user behavior.

Mitigating risk with Citrix Security Analytics

“Citrix Security Analytics was the right mechanism for us to monitor and flag anomalies in user behavior. It allows us to continuously view user access and activity throughout the entire workspace session,” Bodenstein explains. “Thanks to machine learning and artificial intelligence, this analytics software “learns” user behavior and provides intelligent threat detection and mitigation,” he adds.

Bodenstein says, “Our admins were already stretched thin. The preconfigured security policies that come with Citrix Security Analytics helped us to realize value quickly. After a short time, we were then able to customize it to our business requirements,” he relates. “We alleviated many of our concerns about data leakage by taking advantage of the customization capability.

“Now that it is set up, Citrix Security Analytics is incredibly easy to manage. It simply alerts us when there is an anomaly to view, and we address it,” he continues.

“Based on policies we’ve customized, Citrix Security Analytics triggers actions to limit or stop risky behavior,” he notes. “Citrix Security Analytics is sophisticated enough to take into account real-time telemetry data and business context such as app sensitivity and user work hours before flagging user behavior as out-of-the-ordinary.”

Jacques Bodenstein
Lead
Compute and Platform
Aptronics
By implementing these customizable security controls, Aptronics is now able to maintain comprehensive visibility into its environment. At the same time, the team is comfortable that the productivity of validated legitimate users is not impacted by the security measures. The next concern for the team was to make sure that the environment could securely handle data traffic.

**Citrix SD-WAN replaces VPN technology**

Organizations typically use VPN technology for one of two reasons: to connect remote users to corporate assets or to connect one site to another. VPNs create a secure tunnel between the sites and provide a user experience similar to a direct network connection. There are three major negatives, though: lack of scalability, lack of integrated security and lack of visibility into the network traffic across the organization.

Aptronics replaced its VPN technology with Citrix SD-WAN to improve performance and scale for remote site connectivity. Citrix SD-WAN provides reliable, high-performance network connectivity using multiple different transports such as Internet, leased lines and LTE links. It improves users’ application experiences, providing high-performance and reliable network connectivity for virtual apps. Citrix SD-WAN identifies and prioritizes critical application traffic like Citrix HDX, SQL database-based applications and inhouse developed applications and allows central management of security policies across the network. Citrix SD-WAN also reduces latency.

“Citrix SD-WAN replaced our existing site-to-site VPN connectivity. It alleviated security risks and reduced data expenses,” explains Bodenstein. “Using Citrix SD-WAN instead of full VPN will save us a great deal of money because bandwidth in South Africa is so expensive,” he adds.

**A comprehensive solution for hybrid cloud**

As a Citrix Platinum Business Partner, Aptronics uses Citrix technology not only to enable its own business, but also, to serve as a trusted partner to customers implementing Citrix solutions.

Aptronics purchased a number of Citrix solutions that enabled the company to make manageability easier for IT, provide budget relief and deliver better services. The comprehensive Citrix stack includes Citrix Cloud, Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops, Citrix Access Control for Web Apps, Citrix Security Analytics, Citrix Secure Gateway Control and Citrix SD-WAN. The company has become expert in implementing and managing the technology and it advocates similar solutions for its customers.
Citrix technology changed the landscape

In the future, Aptronics may consider other modifications to its hybrid environment, such as popular additional cloud platforms. For now, though, the environment is serving the company well. According to Bodenstein, “Post-pandemic, many employees may not ever return to formal office environments. Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops has enabled us to be well-positioned for that kind of scenario.”

Bodenstein summarizes, “Since we have implemented our Citrix solution, the feedback has been universally positive. In fact, many of our workers have praised the new environment. They have said that they believe they can function remotely as well as, or possibly better than they did in the office.”

For the foreseeable future, the Aptronics technology landscape looks great and it’s easy to navigate. That’s pure gold.