

Citrix enables QBE to move to hybrid cloud

Citrix helps QBE employees work from home during COVID-19

The Business Problem

“It’s the nature of the IT business,” Jethro Eastwood, Workplace Services Manager, QBE Australia Pacific and Asia says matter-of-factly. “We’ve grown accustomed to hearing when things aren’t working. That’s why we were caught off guard when we received a ‘thank you video’ from our European Operations Team saying how well they thought our homeworking solutions, including the new Citrix solution, were performing for remote workers,” Eastwood explains. “That was really quite special!”

For the IT team at QBE, a multi-national insurance company headquartered in Australia, this gesture validated the success of its year-long Citrix Transformation Project. It also took a bit of the sting out of the subsequent detour they had to make. The rapid spread of coronavirus caused a hard stop on the transformation project in order to – in a matter of days – equip the entire workforce to work remotely.

QBE’s new cloud-based hybrid technology platform was initially designed to enable employees to securely work on a digital desktop – either from home or the office, and if desired, on their own devices. The solution was simple and intuitive to use. Workers had secure access to everything they enjoyed in the old on-site office environment including all of their apps and collaboration tools.

Thanks to the longstanding partnership between Citrix and Microsoft, the popular favorite collaboration platform at QBE, Microsoft Teams, even worked seamlessly in the Citrix environment. The solution delivered a great employee experience and workers have been as engaged working in the new Citrix environment as they were in the previous one. With a year of history behind them, the Citrix Transformation Project was well underway and QBE was already showing positive business value.

“Although the project was near completion when we had to pivot to prioritize enabling remote work, we still maintained employee productivity, engagement, and most importantly, satisfaction,” says Eastwood.

Security and the employee experience

The team also succeeded in achieving one goal that is top-of-mind for IT departments everywhere: implementing stringent security that is not invasive.



Industry

Financial services

Location

Australia

Citrix products

- Citrix ADC
- Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops

Key Benefits

- Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops (CVAD) enables the company to have a single global platform and a flexible hybrid cloud environment
- Citrix ADC gives QBE an end-to-end access layer, optimization for Citrix workloads, monitoring and visibility

The goal was to have security that would be transparent to users, deliver protection for sensitive data and assets, and that did not get in the way of a great employee experience. Citrix Consulting worked with the team to ensure optimal cloud hosting and smooth security reviews.

“As part of the initial transformation project, we had a member of our security team embedded to review our design to make sure that the implementation met the highest QBE standards. Over the last 18 months, QBE has significantly ramped up security, yet not at the expense of employees’ interactions with their digital workspaces,” Eastwood notes. “Citrix has enabled us to keep our data secure.”

One year earlier

A little more than a year before coronavirus hit, the team had started its three-part Citrix Transformation Project. There were crucial steps included in the initiative:

- Moving three regional on-premises Citrix implementations (Australia Pacific, North America, and Europe) onto a single, global cloud environment
- Enabling a hybrid cloud set up that could facilitate running virtual desktops and other Citrix workloads in Microsoft Azure, as well as running on-premises data center instances
- Moving users from a Citrix Endpoint Management (formerly XenApp) published desktop environment to a full Windows 10 virtual desktop solution using Citrix Cloud and Microsoft Azure

The company already had a long history of relying on Citrix technology in its on-premises data centers. During the transformation project, the team added a global infrastructure for Citrix Cloud. “Our assessment was that Citrix was doing a good job for us,” says Eastwood. “We had invested extensively in Citrix technology – in skills as well as in the existing infrastructure. Finally, Citrix Cloud makes it all fit together.”

Citrix and Microsoft – an advantageous partnership

Citrix has also maintained a longstanding partnership with Microsoft that nets integration between the companies’ solutions. Today, QBE runs desktops, laptops and VDIs on Microsoft Windows 10. In Australia and North America, existing Citrix workloads were migrated onto the new global Citrix platform and a golden image was created for Microsoft Azure virtual desktops.

“All in all, the combination of Microsoft technology and Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops (CVAD) is the right ‘sweet spot’ for us,” Eastwood declares. The company now sees two main benefits:

- CVAD enables a single consistent global platform for all regions
- It allows the company to have a flexible hybrid cloud environment – including infrastructure on-premises, as well as cloud-based desktops. This has helped QBE scale up in response to the coronavirus pandemic

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“We had Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops in place in our on-premises data center, now we can rapidly spin up workloads in Azure and take advantage of capacity that we didn’t have on-premises before,” says Eastwood. “This can be accomplished in hours, whereas previously, it took months because of the lengthy hardware procurement cycle.”

The combination of Citrix Cloud and Microsoft Azure enables a single global platform with Citrix Cloud providing the management plane and Azure being the cloud platform of choice. Citrix Cloud also gives the team the flexibility to use a variety of different cloud platforms if the need arises.

Then came coronavirus and working from home

As coronavirus spread through Asia, the QBE team was in the midst of finalizing its transformation project and migration.

By this point in the initial transformation project, the VDI image had been ported to run in Azure, but the two main components that were still needed were to spin up the environment at scale, and to assign virtual desktops out to users. Once those things were done, the team needed to support users in transitioning onto virtual desktops.

Things evolved rapidly due to the immense impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Thanks to the QBE team’s tenacity, it quickly onboarded more than 11,000 remote users so that they could work from home during the pandemic. Call center representatives, financial professionals, HR team members, actuaries, and many other job functions have been accommodated.

Citrix ADCs enable better performance and visibility

The QBE solution includes another noteworthy Citrix solution: Citrix ADC, which provides QBE with an end-to-end access layer solution. Now there is a single point of escalation for support and issues. ADC is optimized to deal with Citrix workloads, so it delivers the best possible performance and monitoring information; the team gets visibility into the business and into the support layer. As part of its new solution, QBE will standardize on Citrix for load balancing and access into the Citrix environment.

Citrix Application Delivery Management (ADM) provides the team with a means for license management. Citrix Consulting Services and Priority Support Citrix Consulting Services partnered with QBE to stand up its entire solution.

“Citrix consultants have been fantastic,” declares Eastwood. “They helped us with a number of things, including GSLB and all the Citrix ADC components. They were on board for the entire project to help with anything we needed during the ramp up.”

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QBE also purchased Priority Support, an uplifted service arrangement with a Technical Account Management (TAM) service supporting the company across the globe. Many benefits come as part of this service:

- A dedicated, technical relationship manager or technical account manager
- Proactive assistance in the deployment
- Rapid assessment and action on technical issues that arise
- A firsthand description of applicable new solution features
- Deep technical subject matter expertise that enables better understanding of the QBE environment

“This service has been really great for us,” remarks Eastwood. “Our contact has a deep understanding of our environment, which makes it easier to deal with issues when we raise them.”

The new normal

In the next year, there will be “a new normal”. The QBE team will still have to finish its original transformation, moving its remaining published desktop users onto the Windows 10 pooled desktops environment, and moving those users still on the legacy Citrix platform to a more current one. “Now that we have implemented Citrix Cloud, we have the ability to be flexible and agile,” summarizes Eastwood. “We can really use the cloud in a hybrid way that enables our users to keep capitalizing on our Microsoft tools and keep working no matter what.”

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