Alabama A&M University Continues to Serve Campus Community During COVID-19 Outbreak with Nutanix

Nutanix hyperconverged infrastructure supports staff with remote desktop connectivity

BUSINESS BENEFITS

Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University (AAMU) is a historic, community-focused higher education institution. As a member of the historically black college and university (HBCU) community, AAMU was seeking to enhance its IT infrastructure to support not only its own needs, but similar institutions as well. The University deployed Nutanix Enterprise Cloud with Nutanix Frame, providing a flexible solution that delivered the agility AAMU needed to respond quickly to new needs, including the emerging COVID-19 healthcare crisis.

> "Nutanix Frame enables us to give our users a secure desktop experience, so they can continue to stay productive just as though they are working on their own network. It gives staff access to all our internal resources they require to continue to support our students and campus community."
>
> – Dr. Damian Clarke, Chief Information Officer, AAMU

CHALLENGES

Founded in 1875 by a former slave, AAMU is a dynamic, progressive university with a strong commitment to academic excellence. Its diverse international faculty offers more than 60 undergraduate, graduate and certificate programs. When administrators planned upgrades to the University's infrastructure, they wanted to look beyond their own requirements, and choose a solution that could serve other institutions in the region as well.

INDUSTRY
Higher Education

BENEFITS
- Nutanix Frame provides remote desktop connectivity to more than 100 staff to maintain operations during health crisis

- Scalable infrastructure enables institution to share resources to help support other historical black colleges and universities (HBCUs)

- Business continuity enables University to maintain data integrity and maximize system availability

SOLUTION
- Nutanix Enterprise Cloud OS

- Nutanix Frame

- Nutanix Xi Leap

Applications
- AppsAnywhere

- QuickLaunch SSO tool

- Microsoft SQL

- Oracle databases

"We wanted an infrastructure that could satisfy our needs, and was scalable to provide services to other HBCUs," said Clarke. "I spoke with other CIOs, and we agreed that we cannot achieve our objectives by doing it alone. That's why we looked at Nutanix. The concept of a hyperconverged infrastructure (HCI) made a lot of sense for us."

SOLUTION

AAMU chose the Nutanix Enterprise Cloud well before the COVID-19 outbreak emerged. When the crisis arrived that threatened its users' access to the tools and resources they needed on campus, Clarke and his team activated Nutanix Frame. This Desktop as a Service (DaaS) solution lets organizations access applications on any device, from any location.

"All of our applications are accessible via QuickLaunch single sign-on (SSO) solution, which connects to the AppsAnywhere virtualized application solution," said Clarke. "We don't need to install software on individual devices in the lab. Instead, when a user logs in, they see icons for all the available applications. They can simply click to check out an application, which is temporarily installed for their use."

Nutanix Frame enabled AAMU to quickly provide secure access to high priority users across the University, including business and finance departments, legal departments, IT, and administrators.

CUSTOMER OUTCOME

Nutanix Enterprise Cloud enabled AAMU's staff to remain connected and productive, even in the midst of a fast-changing healthcare crisis. "We were able to roll out Nutanix Frame in a matter of days, and smoothly integrated it into our SSO solution," said Clarke. "We have opened up access to 120 high priority users and can continue to respond to new demands as the situation evolves."

Nutanix HCI offers a flexible environment that gives its staff the freedom of choice to work with the technology that best suits academic or administrative needs. "The flexibility is among the top benefits of Nutanix," said Clarke. "We don't want to be boxed in to using a specific solution; we want people to have options. For example, with Nutanix we can run multiple hypervisors, instead of being stuck with a proprietary product. If we need to go in another direction, we have the flexibility to do that now."

With Xi Leap, AAMU can also rest assured that its systems are backed by full business continuity. "We have consolidated our commodity data centers into a single one that is protected by Xi Leap with multiple failover capability," said Ted Stewart, Manager of Cloud Infrastructure and Systems Technology at AAMU. "Our prior system backed up data in the same environment as the production server, so if something failed, we would have lost everything. Nutanix is the first solution that enables us to support true disaster recovery and business continuity."

AAMU is also running its domain controllers live on a 24x7 basis in the Xi Leap cloud. This ensures protection of employee and student accounts directory, securely stored in the Xi Leap cloud should a local failure require the university invoke business continuity measures.

NEXT STEPS

AAMU deployed its solution with scalability in mind, and the University is already considering new Nutanix solutions to extend its capabilities. With Nutanix Flow, AAMU can further simplify its network and policy management to support multi-tenant offerings.

"We are looking at Flow to enable shared services for multi-tenant data centers," said Clarke. "It will enable us to segment off specific users and provide them with their own environments for specific use cases, while keeping data secure."

AAMU is also considering deploying Nutanix Calm to enable application automation and lifecycle management for Nutanix and public clouds. "We have a consortium of HBCUs in place, and we are considering offering cloud services to those tenants," said Clarke. "Calm will enable us to orchestrate the provisioning and management of shared services."

The flexible, extensible Nutanix solution has enabled AAMU to not only redefine the role of technology on its own campus, but help other HBCUs move forward on their journeys as well.

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