



Empire Life Moves from Mainframe to Web-Scale

Nutanix Slashes Datacenter Footprint by 16:1, Reduces IT Costs, Simplifies Storage Management, and Transforms Disaster Recovery

Company Background

Empire Life helps Canadians build wealth and protect their financial security with competitive individual and group life and health insurance and a variety of investment and retirement products. Founded in 1923, Empire Life was named the “Best Life Insurance Company in Canada in 2014” by World Finance magazine in its annual insurance awards competition.

Relying on an Aging Mainframe Environment

Empire Life’s infrastructure includes a mainframe environment, with a large SAN backend and standard x86 servers. “We are using the mainframe for all of our critical financial data and daily investment transactions,” noted Dave Hunter, IT director at Empire Life. “The equipment and support is very expensive, and the annual maintenance contracts high. We wanted to find a more cost-effective solution that could provide enough performance for our mission-critical apps and enable us to launch new solutions, including hybrid cloud.”

Choosing Nutanix

Empire Life first heard about Nutanix while attending a presentation given by Zycom Technology, an IT solutions provider and Nutanix Elite partner headquartered in Ontario. “We were presenting on hyper-converged infrastructure with 3rd Platform solutions, including VDI and Private Cloud, at one of our client education seminars,” noted Terry Buchanan, vice president of Zycom. “The Nutanix Virtual Computing Platform supports so many use cases, we knew it would be an excellent fit for Empire Life’s strategic plans relating to the mainframe conversion project and other data center initiatives.”

The Move to Web-Scale Delivers Significant Performance Improvements

Empire Life’s IT service partner for the mainframe re-hosting project was unfamiliar with the Nutanix platform and its performance characteristics. To ensure the viability of the platform to support Empire Life’s solution, the service partner performed a series of application benchmark and performance tests normally conducted with customer target platforms. The Service partner was very impressed with the performance of the hyper-converged platform and remarked that “Nutanix performed as well as – or far better than – all of the other tested systems for their baseline metrics”, Babcock reported. “The Nutanix appliances also delivered four times the IOPS at four times lower latency compared to our SAN.” Our partner estimated that Empire Life would obtain an immediate 40% performance improvement by moving to Nutanix.

“The space efficiency of the Nutanix appliances is simply amazing. We are transitioning from four full 48U racks to just one rack using only 12U of space with the Nutanix platform. The 16:1 reduction in footprint is very impressive!”

- Jeff Babcock, IT Technical Infrastructure Manager, Empire Life



Industry

Insurance

Business Needs

Needed to replace expensive mainframe environment, cut datacenter footprint, and improve disaster recovery for mission-critical applications.

Solution

Nutanix web-scale, hyper-converged infrastructure is now being used for all of Empire Life’s critical production workloads as well as its development, test, and desktop virtualization (VDI) environments.

Benefits

- Lowered IT Infrastructure costs by 50-60%
- Achieved fast initial installation in less than half a day for 13 nodes and 100TB of storage
- Reduced datacenter footprint from 192U to 12U, for a 16:1 reduction across all four use cases
- Shortened RTO from 48 hours to just minutes, at one third the cost
- Simplified management and troubleshooting





Faster Installation

“It took less than half a day to deploy the entire Nutanix environment,” noted Babcock. “That was quite surprising, considering we started with 13 nodes and over 100TB of storage. It was an order of magnitude faster than installing anything comparable in our older environment. Migrating the workloads to Nutanix has been very simple and straightforward, in most cases without requiring downtime.”

50% - 65% Reduction in IT Infrastructure Costs

The move to Nutanix has been very cost-effective for Empire Life. “The ongoing maintenance costs associated with our old mainframe environment are prohibitively expensive,” Hunter reported. “We anticipate we will be able to avoid significant costs over the course of the project by transitioning our mainframe to the Nutanix web-scale environment. We expect cost reductions in the order of 50-65%.”

Easy Scalability

In addition to lower acquisition costs, Nutanix’s scalability enables the Empire Life IT team to easily add capacity on the fly as demand increases. “With Nutanix, we don’t have to purchase a lot of expensive infrastructure upfront,” noted Hunter. “This is a huge benefit coming from the mainframe world where new infrastructure purchases are very costly and have to be planned out very far in advance.”

16:1 Reduction in Datacenter Footprint

“The space efficiency of the Nutanix appliances is simply amazing,” Babcock said. “We are transitioning from four full 48U racks to just 12 rack units of Nutanix. The 16:1 reduction in footprint was very impressive! We are now planning to move other workloads over to Nutanix as well, which will lead to further power and cooling savings.”

Better DR at 1/3 the Cost

Empire Life had been relying on a tape-based DR approach. “We are using a third-party disaster recovery provider,” Babcock explained. “Whenever there was a recovery scenario, we had to rebuild our systems from scratch using the backup tapes. While reliable, recovery is more extensive and laborious than what could otherwise be provided through virtualization. We needed to find a more efficient way to restore our systems.”

Nutanix will enable Empire Life to completely revamp its disaster recovery strategy. “Replicating our Nutanix-based data is very straightforward,” noted Babcock. “Nutanix provides very powerful features, including block-level replication, that enable us to keep a warm or ‘near real-time’ copy of our environment as a DR standby system. With Nutanix, we expect that recovery will take just minutes. We look forward to leveraging this new capability.”

Nutanix also is significantly reducing the cost of DR for Empire Life. “By moving to a hyper-converged system, we no longer have to keep a large amount of expensive hardware and services at a hosted DR facility,” said Hunter. “We can do all of the replication ourselves for our DR needs. Nutanix will enable a much better DR solution at a significantly lower cost from our current hosted restoration services approach.”

Moving Forward

After seeing the potential of Nutanix across many areas, Empire Life decided to extend the scope of the project. Nutanix is now being used for four different use cases at Empire Life, split across two clusters – one for the company’s production server and mainframe application environments, and the other for its development/testing and virtual desktop environments. “Nutanix will be our default platform for everything X86-based going forward,” noted Hunter.

Strategic

“We are very pleased with our decision to move our core infrastructure to a Nutanix based solution” says Kevin J. Arbour, Vice President of Enterprise Services and Technologies at Empire Life. “Enterprises are entering a digital economy moving from an era of IT industrialization to the era of digitalization where new business models bring the digital and physical worlds together. We are seeing unprecedented changes in business designs and disruptions in existing business models. This drives new expectations and IT service demands. Infrastructure and Operations leaders need to embrace new technologies and architectural paradigms that enables and grows with the business while managing the total cost of ownership”.

About Zycom Technology Inc.

Zycom Technology is an IT solution provider headquartered in Ontario, Canada and a Nutanix Elite Partner. Zycom is future focused on emerging 3rd Platform technologies and deliver valued service to clients based on proven experience. Established in 1998, Zycom has evolved in to a premiere IT services organization in Canada. Our customers span the entire sector from Healthcare, Education, Government, Enterprise and SMBs. We provide a full range of products and services including: professional services, managed services, private cloud XaaS services and IT procurement.

About Nutanix

Nutanix delivers web-scale converged infrastructure to medium and large enterprises with its software-driven Virtual Computing Platform, natively converging compute and storage into a single solution to drive unprecedented simplicity in the datacenter. Customers can start with a few servers and scale to thousands, with predictable performance and economics. With a proprietary elastic data fabric and consumer-grade management, Nutanix is the blueprint for application-optimized and policy-driven infrastructure.

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