



RADIO 2.0: MULTIMEDIA EXPERIENCE EXPANDS AUDIENCE



CUSTOMER

HIT RADIO FFH (RADIO/TELE FFH GMBH & CO. BETRIEBS-KG)

WEBSITE

WWW.FFH.DE

INDUSTRY

MEDIA

LOCATION

BAD VILBEL, GERMANY

CHALLENGES

- Competitive disadvantage as a result of website downtimes when access rates were high
- No flexible server scaling from former cloud provider
- No possibility to configure and access servers in the cloud

SOLUTION

Virtualisation of the infrastructure with the Software-Defined Data Center (SDDC) as a complete package in the OVH Private Cloud.

OUTCOME

- 24/7 website availability even during peak loads
- Server scalability provides resources on demand
- Flexibility in the creation of test environments

Whether online, mobile, social media or studio live cam, radio broadcasters need to reach their listeners over a range of digital channels to make their voice heard with their target audience for the long term. HIT RADIO FFH, the number one radio station in the state of Hesse, concentrates on a complete multimedia experience with its information and entertainment programme on the radio, website and app. Therefore HIT RADIO FFH needed a scalable and flexible infrastructure with access on the server management. In order to guarantee 24/7 website access for its audience, HIT RADIO FFH chose VMware's Software-Defined Data Center from OVH's Private Cloud.

Company Profile

HIT RADIO FFH has been the most listened-to radio station in Hesse for 27 years. According to the latest media analysis, the station reaches two million people every day. It broadcasts music, reports live on events in Hesse and the world and provides weather and traffic information from six studios in the region. HIT RADIO FFH, a radio station of Radio/Tele FFH GmbH & Co. Betriebs-KG, went live on air for the first time in 1989. From its headquarters in Bad Vilbel on the edge of Frankfurt, am Main, Germany, the market leader in the radio landscape in Hesse operates not just HIT RADIO FFH but also the region's most successful youth radio station planet radio as well as harmony.fm. The web portals of the three stations receive six million visits every month. The media offering is complemented by 20 web radio channels for various target audiences.

Challenge: optimal availability and maximum flexibility

Radio has long since ceased to be a one-dimensional medium transmitted over FM. In order to find a voice in the highly competitive Hessian radio market with many stations and more than 50,000 web radio stations, broadcasters need to be present over many digital channels. This is why, in addition to conventional radio, HIT RADIO FFH pursues a policy of a multimedia web presence with live streaming, web radio, music playlists, video clips, live webcams in the studio, event ticket shop and social media. Listeners can also use a personalised radio app on their tablet or smartphone to access the entire programme of entertainment and information. "Our listeners and advertising customers expect our programme to be accessible across various digital platforms around the clock - this is what constitutes our operational dependability as a private radio station," explains Roger Hofmann. As Head of Digital, he and his team are responsible for the online servers, streaming services and website hosting at HIT RADIO FFH. Website availability could be assured on days with average

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THOMAS WINKELMANN
WEB DEVELOPER
HIT RADIO FFH

VMWARE SOLUTIONS

- VMware vSphere 6.0 Enterprise Plus
- VMware vCenter
- VMware NSX

APPLICATIONS VIRTUALISED

- Content management systems
- Various databases
- Web servers

HARDWARE

- OVH Intel Server



rates of access. However, it became critical during times of peak load. “In extreme weather situations or when competitions run, up to one hundred times the number of users access our website and app. It was sometimes difficult to absorb these peak loads flexibly with our previous infrastructure,” Hofmann continues. Instead of a colourful world of radio, the website just displayed the message: ‘Server not found’. “And of course for us that’s the worst-case scenario,” Hofmann adds.

The station has relied for some time on a combination of on-premise infrastructure and additional cloud resources for website hosting, with both environments running completely separately from each other. With the old provider, there were two virtual machines running VMware vSphere and VMware vCenter. Web developer Thomas Winkelmann said, “Back then we had no access to server management, and we couldn’t book additional servers flexibly, either. Any change to the configuration required a request to be sent to a technician via a ticketing system – making the process far too cumbersome and slow for us, as we experiment a lot with new technology.”

Solution: VMware SDDC from the OVH Cloud

Because HIT RADIO FFH had been able to ensure greater reliability using server virtualisation with vSphere in the past, the offer for the new cloud solution had to include VMware within its scope. Said Hofmann, “With the new cloud solution, it was crucial for us that we don’t have two different virtualization solutions. The aim was for team members to be able to handle VMware and have the same environment available as the web platform, which we cannot provide locally as we don’t have the bandwidth.”

An important detail was that the new cloud service had to be transparently separate from the hardware to ensure that the IT department was completely independent of a particular host. “With the old cloud provider, we didn’t have the flexibility to set up new virtual machines within ten minutes, to add memory or to clone services,” Winkelmann recounted. The service had to guarantee the operational reliability, flexibility and scalability of the servers, which at HIT RADIO FFH mainly comprise content management systems, web servers and databases.

After a visit to the OVH Academy, a free cloud training seminar provided by OVH and VMware, the station chose OVH Private Cloud SDDC in a comprehensive as-a-service package including VMware vSphere, VMware vCenter and VMware NSX. Entirely managed by OVH, the operating environment is based on VMware’s industry-leading Software-Defined Data Center (SDDC), which combines computing, cloud management, network virtualisation and storage for virtual machines at the highest level. “The product – a managed VMware SDDC environment in the cloud where we don’t need to look after the hardware, but where we can book additional hardware at any time – convinced us,” said Winkelmann. The possibility of a distributed firewall using VMware NSX impressed the IT experts in terms of IT security. This allows greater control over virtualised workloads and networks through the configuration of access rights to the networks and creation of security rules and necessary network services. “The close collaboration between VMware and OVH on the technological development and the first-class customer service impressed us from the word go,” said Winkelmann. The transition to the new cloud environment ran smoothly and was completed within just two months. There were no outages of any kind, even during the changeover period.

“As a radio station, we are pursuing a clear strategy of mobile first, which we are able to realise perfectly with VMware’s SDDC in the OVH cloud.”

ROGER HOFMANN
HEAD OF DIGITAL
HIT RADIO FFH

Outcome: website with 24/7 availability increases digital reach

The result is plain for all to see: HIT RADIO FFH already operates 25 virtual machines in OVH’s Private Cloud SDDC with two hosts and four data stores. The radio station can create as many VMs as it needs at any time and modify the size of its infrastructure by adding or removing resources. Thanks to OVH’s guarantee, a new ESX server can be made available within 15 minutes, which assures smooth operations in scheduled as well as unscheduled situations. The VMware SDDC in the OVH cloud allows the team to install updates more easily or to create a snapshot of a VM when needed. Monitoring and maintenance are now easy and transparent tasks. In addition, the web developers can now set up test environments much more easily to test new features in order to provide their radio audience with the highest level of exciting digital media services. And another important point – it is now easy to absorb problematic peak loads in website access. “Every time our website was down in the past, there was a huge danger that our audience would go to the competitor’s radio station and get the information there. The biggest ROI from VMware SDDC in the OVH cloud for us is quite clearly the fact that we can be reached by our audience 24/7,” Hofmann stated emphatically.

Looking to the future

HIT RADIO FFH is planning to supplement the SDDC architecture with VMware vSAN in the near future. The industry-leading software for HCI offers flash-optimised, secure storage for all critical vSphere workloads. A new project with OVH has also been launched: radio streaming. Part of the servers for this will run virtually with VMware in the OVH cloud, while another part of the servers will run in dedicated mode in the new OVH data centre in Limburg, Germany. “As a media business, we need to be where our listeners are,” says Winkelmann. There has been huge growth in access to the radio app from mobile devices in the last six years alone. “And as this is certain to continue to increase in the future, the fact that our listeners can access our offering at any time from any location – and not quickly click to a rival station – is of clear competitive advantage to us. We continue to pursue a clear strategy of mobile first – and we are ideally prepared for this with VMware and OVH.”

