Aviva

"Our TAM is absolutely essential to our success. He constantly delivers technical expertise, experience we couldn't get anywhere else and a long-term vision for our infrastructure. Those skills, along with empathy and honesty, make him a trusted and valuable part of our team."

— Max Walker, Solution Architect, Aviva

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Challenge

Aviva needed to ensure a smooth transition to virtualization technology as they embarked on an initiative to reduce reliance on physical servers through virtualization.

Solution

- Provides ongoing visibility into current and future VMware products
- Creates customized roadmaps to plan entire architecture around current and future virtualization offerings
- Shares in-depth knowledge of VMware products
- Guides Aviva toward the most cost-effective purchasing decisions
- Expedites support

Results

- Minimized the cost and effort of upgrading to VSphere 4
- Completed an on-time, successful upgrade to VMware ESX 3.5i
- Saved thousands of dollars each month in power and maintenance costs by virtualizing physical servers
- Made steady progress towards the company's long-term goal of 80 percent virtualization of the datacenter

Insurance giant discovers a unique and trusted partnership with their VMware Technical Account Manager (TAM)

VMware Technical Account Manager (TAM) partners with Aviva to create a virtualization roadmap to cut costs, eliminate redundancies and reduce its environmental footprint

Summary

For more than 300 years, Aviva (formerly Norwich Union) has been a household name for consumer insurance in Europe. Tracing its presence back to 1686, it was one of the first fire insurers, the first to issue a burglary policy, and the first and only insurance company to hold a royal warrant. Today, Aviva is the world's fifth largest insurance group and the largest provider in the UK. It provides savings, investments and insurance services to more than 50 million customers across Europe, North America and Asia Pacific.

Aviva's leaders understand that a rich history is not enough to attract and keep customers. As a forward-thinking company, it is constantly evolving its services—and its brand—to keep customer satisfaction at the heart of everything it does.

With a goal of better serving customers by creating the most efficient and reliable technology infrastructure possible, Aviva embarked on its first virtualization effort with VMware in 2004. The goal was simple: to reduce its reliance on physical servers. As with most of its new initiatives, Aviva's IT staff chose to enlist the support of a Technical Account Manager (TAM), expecting that "expertise on the inside" would ensure a smooth transition to the new technology. What they hadn't expected was that this virtualization project and their dedicated TAM would completely change they way they thought about their IT infrastructure.

Today, nearly six years later, Aviva's IT staff and the VMware TAM have worked in partnership to create a virtualization roadmap that impacts nearly every aspect of the organization. Virtualization is not only at the heart of every IT initiative, but also at the core to the company's long-term efforts to be a global leader in the marketplace by cutting costs, eliminating redundancies, and reducing its environmental footprint.

Virtualization Everywhere

With roots that date back to the late seventeenth century, Aviva is one of the world's oldest insurance companies. As the centuries have gone by, Aviva has never stopped looking for opportunities to grow beyond the borders of the United Kingdom, where its headquarters are located. But global growth often creates a need for companies to build out large, expensive IT infrastructures.

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To avoid the proliferation of physical servers, Aviva embraced virtualization technology and began its first project with VMware in 2004.

"The VMware consultants were instrumental in getting us started with virtualization," recalls Max Walker, Solution Architect, Aviva. "They prepared a report to show us how virtualization would affect our company, and then worked alongside our solution architects to implement the entire solution from end to end. They came in with a big-picture view of embedding virtualization as the deployment method of choice for all of our U.K. server implementations. With their help, we set a foundation that would give virtualization a permanent place at Aviva."

Aviva and VMware developed a strategy to virtualize the servers that support all but a few key applications. This strategic principle ensured that Aviva would have a majority of its data centre's running virtualized workloads by 2012.

"Bringing in VMware and its consultants was the tipping point for us as an IT organization," says Walker. "Aside from some long-term contracts and legacy applications that can't be virtualized—which accounts for about 20 percent—we're virtualizing everything. If it can be virtualized, it will be."

Tam Leadership Drives Aggressive Goals

By the time Aviva's engagement with VMware Professional Services expired in 2005, the company was well on its way towards its virtualization goals. But Aviva also realized that to get there, it would need to plan its technology roadmap carefully, resolve support issues promptly and keep its ecosystem running smoothly. For all of these reasons, Aviva decided to engage a VMware Technical Account Manager (TAM).

VMware TAMs use a proven methodology to serve as a cross-functional, cross-company advocate for VMware clients. They act as enablers to guide clients in best practices and facilitate rapid progress towards clients' strategic goals. The TAM Program is designed for large companies that plan to standardize on server virtualization—especially companies that use multiple products from partners in the virtual ecosystem.

"Our plans called for increasing our levels of virtualization over the next few years," says Walker, "so, we wanted the highest possible level of communication with VMware. But our TAM turned out to deliver much more than we expected. He doesn't just get our support issues addressed quickly, he also helps us exchange ideas freely with VMware and plan our IT future based on what VMware is developing."

When Aviva's current TAM, Toby Luscher, began working with Aviva, the company was planning an upgrade to VMware ESX 3.5i. Luscher immediately began helping Aviva understand how the new release would fit into its existing virtualization ecosystem and how it could best make the transition. As a result, Aviva went live on time.

"VMware ESX 3.5i is a newer, smaller-footprint platform, and Aviva was one of our first customers to deploy it," says Toby Luscher, Technical Account Manager, VMware. "I eased them onto it while navigating the process changes that the new solution would require. Some of the management tools they had used on their previous version wouldn't work on the new release, so I helped Aviva's team get these issues straightened out."

"Virtualization has revolutionized the way we support our business. With virtual servers, the possibilities are endless—regardless of the hardware—and there's a built-in resiliency."

— Max Walker, Aviva

"The VWware TAM organization is absolutely essential to our success. Our TAM is the team member with deep understanding of virtualization technology, connections into every major software provider we work with, and a long-term understanding of the VMware roadmap. Without him, we would be guessing where to go instead of marching with purpose in the right direction."

— Max Walker, Aviva

Truly Personalized Service

First and foremost, Aviva's VMware TAM is an advocate who can help push service tickets through VMware's support organization for faster resolutions. Aviva's technical staff can call or email the TAM at any time to ask questions and report problems. The TAM will then spring into action, contacting the appropriate department within VMware to find an answer that's tailored to Aviva's exact situation and needs.

"Our TAM delivers truly personalized service," says Walker. "He has the deep product knowledge and direct access to VMware technical communities that a third-party consultant would not be able to match. As our gateway into VMware, he helps us track down information that's specific to our technical context, and escalates requests as needed. Thanks to our TAM, we're never too far away from a senior VMware person in Support or Product Development who has the exact information we need. Typical turnaround time is days, not weeks—even though our TAM is often reaching out to the U.S. for answers."

Every Friday, Luscher holds a conference call with Walker's staff to share a weekly report that captures all of Aviva's current support requests, as well as outstanding questions on licensing, training and certification. Luscher works with Aviva's team to review and prioritize items, ensuring speedy resolution.

Once a month, Luscher visits Aviva onsite to discuss high-level issues. He shares roadmap updates from VMware, collects feedback on how Aviva's implementation is working overall and discusses issues that involve other vendors.

"Some companies see a TAM as an aspirin—someone they can call on when they're in pain," says Walker. "We prefer to think of TAMs as a vitamin. Someone who is part of the team, keeping us moving, and constantly looking for ways to improve the health of our overall virtualization ecosystem."

Preventing Unnecessary Costs

As Aviva continues to virtualize its physical infrastructure, its TAM will keep sharing information about where VMware is heading over the next 12 to 18 months. With one eye on VMware's product roadmap and another on Aviva's business plans, he can recommend VMware products and technologies that will speed the transition to virtual machines.

Aviva has achieved a payback on its investment in the TAM Program not only by getting faster resolutions for its support issues, but also by gaining the insight to make smarter technology decisions. During its upgrade to VMware ESX 3.5i, Aviva's TAM made a recommendation that saved the company significant time and money in a subsequent upgrade.

"We were originally going to implement the embedded version of VMware ESX 3.5i on a USB key," says Walker. "But our TAM looked at the VMware roadmap and told us that if we implemented the full-blown version that installs on every server, we could eliminate much of the cost and hassle of upgrading to VSphere 4. That's the kind of insight we would be lacking without our TAM."

Aviva's TAM has also helped the company calculate its exact savings do date. By eliminating hundreds of physical servers. Perhaps most importantly, the TAM has given Aviva the confidence to pursue an aggressive virtualization strategy that relies on cutting-edge technologies.

"After we first shared our architectural plans with our TAM back in 2005, he helped us to very quickly virtualize 700 servers," says Walker. "Since then, we haven't looked back. Virtualization has revolutionized the way we support our business. With virtual servers, the possibilities are endless—regardless of the hardware—and there's a built-in resiliency."

Aviva will continue to rely on its TAM as it progresses towards its virtualization goals.

"Our VMware TAM has always guided our virtualization decisions with an eye for current industry standards, the needs of each application and cost-effectiveness," says Walker. "We've experienced prompt responses, a high level of understanding, empathy and honesty. We can ask any technical question and get the expert advice we need."

For More Information

More information about VMware software and services can be found at http://www.vmware.com and from your local VMware representative.