Bank am Bellevue is an independent Swiss financial institution that is part of the Bellevue Group. The bank’s IT department was faced with the challenge of driving the bank’s transformation from an investment bank to a private banking institution and helping this new business segment succeed. At the same time, IT systems had to meet Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority (FINMA) cybercrime requirements. With the support of VMware, the IT department was able to master several challenges. These included the online launch of their portfolio with the highest security level. Bank employees from New York to Frankfurt can access systems securely, in real time, capturing any minimal exchange rate fluctuation.

Bank am Bellevue, headquartered in Küsnacht near Zurich, is part of the Bellevue Group. The bank is an independent Swiss financial institution with managed client assets of CHF 12.7 billion in 2018. Bellevue Group was established in 1993 by entrepreneurs committing to find and present innovative investment ideas for their institutional clients. A strong innovative drive has distinguished the company from the very beginning, and the firm’s credo has always been to seek the maximum possible alignment between the interests of its clients and its own interests. In 2016 Bellevue Group decided to add a new dimension to its durable and dependable corporate “DNA” by starting to offer its services to private clients, in addition to its established base of institutional investors. The Bellevue Group’s goal for the coming years is to consistently expand its new client portfolio in the wealth management area as well as its international presence in locations such as Zurich, London, Frankfurt, Curacao and New York.

**Challenge**

The wealthy private clients of Bank am Bellevue are a discerning target group accustomed to high-quality, personalized and individually tailored services. For this upmarket clientele, confidence in the absolute reliability and security of the financial institution is key. Private banking is a new business area in development and has different IT requirements. The IT department supports all business units effectively using innovative technologies in order to best advise the premium target group. Added value for clients includes for example, direct rapid access to research information and a shorter response time at Bellevue to changing market situations, such as exchange rates. Services for private clients require far more complex IT services. A new IT structure flanked by the highest possible security measures was required to launch their portfolio safely online and open the systems to clients.
IT IS DRIVING THE TRANSFORMATION OF BANK AM BELLEVUE FROM INVESTMENT BANK TO PRIVATE BANKING INSTITUTION

Security is on top of the IT department's priority agenda. To manage large asset portfolios, for example non-disclosure agreements, need to be signed including complete emergency plans and disaster recovery scenarios. These plans ensure that the systems are quickly back online in case of emergency. Meeting FINMA requirements to defend against cyber attacks was another reason for restructuring IT. The bank also wanted to digitize processes and expand internationally.

Action

Bellevue Group has relied on VMware solutions since 2010. The positive experience with VMware was the reason to turn to the proven partner for this very complex, strategically important project. To offer a portfolio online, which meant provisioning data on clients' end devices, Bank am Bellevue chose VMware’s NSX Data Center network virtualization platform. Opening the network to clients was done upon client request, but at the same time posed the risk for possible cyberattacks. “We chose VMware NSX Data Center as micro-segmentation specifically controls the network, supporting greatly improved data security for the client,” explains Holger Schultes, COO at Bank am Bellevue and CIO at Bellevue Group. Thanks to good preparation, VMware NSX was implemented in just two months.

VMware vRealize Network Insight helped define the NSX micro-segmentation policy and provides visibility into the system through a clear graphical representation of all communication paths between machines. With the multitude of new services for the private banking sector, increased efficiency in the IT team was a desired effect. Thanks to VMware vRealize Automation and vRealize Operations, various processes can now be automated and optimized. As a proactive data center operations tool, vRO monitors the utilization of the server hardware and informs about future bottlenecks. The vRA tool relocates IT staff activities such as providing virtual machines for a project through a self-service portal to the responsible project managers in the departments.

The bank’s IT landscape at Bellevue is characterized by 100 percent virtualization. The company operates two data centers in Switzerland with connections to all branch offices from Frankfurt to New York. Bank am Bellevue uses VMware vSphere as its only hypervisor for all 120 virtual servers and 120 virtualized desktops by Citrix - resulting from an extensive consolidation project of IT and storage systems. 120 terabytes of storage can now be used.

Absolute reliability and availability in real time, which are partly a result of the use of vRealize Operations, are essential for Bank am Bellevue: “If the price of a share changes by a few cents, our employees of the trading department must be able to react in real time. IT - including VMware’s solution - is essential for our business model,” continues Holger Schultes.

Results and Impact

Today, Bellevue Group benefits extensively from the new solution. New client or business unit requirements, such as new software, can be implemented quicker and at lower cost. Virtual servers can be implemented for projects at the push of a button - which used to take a day in the past. In this way, the productivity of employees rises and resources can be used in a better way. Thanks to automation and simplified administration, Holger Schultes’ IT team of five can work purposefully and effectively, which saves costs.
Bank am Bellevue is very satisfied with the new IT infrastructure driving agility and thus strengthening its market position in the new private banking segment. "VMware continues to develop its proven and innovative products – providing us with security and confidence in using a stable and reliable infrastructure," summarizes Holger Schultes. The Bank am Bellevue project was supported by its partner Netcloud AG and the VMware Switzerland team.

The financial world must react appropriately to market situations in real time without any delays. 80 percent of the bank’s employees at Bellevue work with Bloomberg financial software. This includes comprehensive graphical representations and analyses that cannot be displayed if the IT system is not running at peak performance. Thanks to the new IT infrastructure, the Bank am Bellevue benefits from 24/7 availability, reliability and high performance.

The investment in IT security was a must for Bank am Bellevue – protecting the network against external attacks is indispensable, especially after launching an online access to the portfolio. “We have done our best to ensure very high IT security standards and can pass this on to our clients with a clear conscience,” summarizes Holger Schultes.

Looking Ahead
Digitalization will continuously affect the financial sector in the coming years in addition to growing cybercrime challenges. As a result, IT will gain importance for the entire business. However, Bank am Bellevue is already well equipped today with its state-of-the-art and secure IT infrastructure. They have laid an important foundation for the future as a private banking institution. According to Holger Schultes, a topic for the future might be the cloud, if the conditions are set right.