



Realized nearly 20 percent cost savings by moving to a managed disaster recovery solution



Simplified management of IT environment for a small team



Mitigated risk with reliable disaster recovery services in the cloud

Pennsylvania Lumbermens Mutual Stays Lean with Disaster Recovery in the Cloud



PENNSYLVANIA LUMBERMENS MUTUAL
INSURANCE COMPANY

Pennsylvania Lumbermens Mutual Insurance Company is a property and casualty insurance carrier serving the lumber and building materials industries. Founded almost 125 years ago, the company offers coverage to lumberyards, retail dealers and transport vehicles in all states in the U.S.

INDUSTRY

Financial services

HEADQUARTERS

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

ABOUT FACTION

Faction is a leading multi-cloud platform-as-a-service provider and a VMware Cloud Verified partner, offering a wide range of managed services to increase security, resilience and control over hybrid and multi-cloud environments. factioninc.com

VMWARE FOOTPRINT

VMware Cloud™ on AWS
VMware vSphere®
VMware Site Recovery Manager™
VMware NSX® Edge™

Insurance companies perform a crucial function—backing up their customers in the event of a disaster. But insurers themselves must be ready to recover from worst-case scenarios, whether a power outage or a natural disaster. Not only is a solid disaster recovery (DR) plan good for business, it’s often required by regulations.

As a niche insurance provider for the lumber industry, it’s imperative for Pennsylvania Lumbermens Mutual Insurance Company (PLM) to maintain business continuity while keeping IT operations lean. To do so, the company is moving application workloads to the cloud and relying on VMware Cloud Verified partner *Faction* to manage the hybrid multi-cloud environment. Its latest move involved migrating its DR site to VMware Cloud on AWS, which reduced costs by nearly 20 percent, and gave PLM the scalability and resiliency to keep business-critical systems running in the event of a disaster.

A journey from bare metal to VMs to the cloud

Moving to the cloud has been a gradual journey for PLM. Over the past decade, its IT infrastructure evolved from bare-metal servers to virtualized on-premises workloads with VMware tools to managed services in a hybrid multi-cloud environment. VMware Cloud Verified partner Faction played an important role in that evolution for the past six years.

“We used to run everything on premises, but as we reduced our physical footprint, we needed a partner that could provide co-location and managed services,” says BJ Gardner, lead systems architect at PLM. “Faction was a good fit for us because they provided highly personal service and really became a part of our team.”





Faction started by hosting a private cloud environment in New Jersey and providing a DR site in Atlanta, Georgia, with PLM managing its own backup and recovery from its on-premises data center in Philadelphia. But when the contract came up for renewal in 2018, there was a new opportunity to explore thanks to Faction's participation in the VMware Cloud Provider™ Program.

"After losing some headcount, we needed a way to manage the backup process with fewer resources," Gardner says. "Faction had just started offering its Hybrid Disaster Recovery as a Service offering with VMware Cloud on AWS. It was a great fit for our needs."

It also kicked off the next phase of PLM's journey to the cloud.

Securing the future with managed disaster recovery in the cloud

Already using VMware solutions for its on-premises workloads, IT decision-makers at PLM felt comfortable moving the DR environment to VMware Cloud on AWS. The Faction Hybrid Disaster Recovery as a Service (DRaaS) offering uses the proven VMware platform to bring the scale and flexibility of the public cloud to PLM's backup and recovery needs.

"Faction provides a single point of contact for our recovery cycle, with a fully scripted plan and defined recovery point objectives," explains Gardner. "We can rely on Faction and the VMware Cloud on AWS platform to get us back up and running when needed."

The DR solution is the latest addition to PLM's hybrid multi-cloud environment. That includes business-critical systems such as policy and claims applications, hosted in public clouds by the vendors, and the document imaging system running in Faction's data center. It also includes systems running on premises in PLM's data center, such as the accounting application, legacy systems, file servers and the Office 365 suite, including Microsoft Dynamics 365.

The workloads in these two data centers are replicated to the cloud-based DR site. Faction uses VMware Site Recovery Manager to orchestrate failover and failback operations—tasks such as defining the recovery plan, creating protection groups and re-IPing machines.

"VMware tools are crucial to PLM's DR environment," says Shaun Brower, systems engineer at Faction. "With the underlying support of VMware vSphere and VMware Site Recovery Manager, we can automate operations, perform tests with minimal disruption and act fast in the event of downtime."

Faction also uses VMware NSX Edge devices as firewalls, removing the maintenance burden from PLM IT staff. As Gardner points out, "The beauty of managed services is that we don't have to think about detailed network components or worry about routing issues."

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BJ GARDNER
LEAD SYSTEMS ARCHITECT, PENNSYLVANIA
LUMBERMENS MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY

Cost-effective scalability and flexibility

In the insurance business, extended downtime or data loss is not an option—insurers must provide reliable services under any circumstances. But staying prepared day to day can be time consuming and expensive.

By working with Faction to move its DR site to VMware Cloud on AWS, PLM's lean IT team has offloaded several tasks, including maintenance of physical hosts and manual backups. The company has also gained near-limitless scalability to handle growing workloads such as the document imaging system, which requires extensive storage capacity.

The shift to the cloud has also generated substantial cost savings for PLM. “By moving to a managed DR solution with Faction and VMware Cloud on AWS, we saw costs go down by nearly 20 percent,” says Gardner. “Plus, as our team got smaller, the solution really helped us streamline by taking many internal responsibilities off our plate and automating manual procedures in the event of a disaster.”

PLM has come a long way since the days of manual tape backups on bare-metal servers. With its DR site and other workloads moving to a hybrid multi-cloud environment, the company can rely on greater scalability and flexibility in its IT infrastructure. Its disaster recovery capabilities have become stronger as automation through VMware tools leaves less room for human error, which is crucial for business continuity and regulatory compliance.

Looking ahead

Still in the early stages of the managed solution, PLM and Faction are preparing to launch their first DR test for compliance auditing purposes. Meanwhile, the insurance company has its sights set on long-term goals for its IT operations.

“VMware and Faction have paved the way for us to continue moving our workloads to the cloud,” Gardner says. “While legacy systems will stay on premises, we aim to have a distributed IT environment across multiple private and public clouds—which ultimately keeps our operations more secure and available.”



@PLMinsurance moves disaster recovery to the cloud and sees nearly 20 percent cost savings with Faction and #VMware.
