



SMARTGAMES LEAVES NOTHING TO CHANCE IN MAINTAINING COMPETITIVE EDGE IN ONLINE LOTTERY INDUSTRY

SMARTGAMES TECHNOLOGIES

CUSTOMER

SMARTGAMES TECHNOLOGIES

WEB SITE

WWW.ZEAL-NETWORK.CO.UK

INDUSTRY

ONLINE LOTTERY

LOCATION

UNITED KINGDOM

KEY CHALLENGES

- Speeding up production cycle
- Increase efficiency
- Reduce complexity

SOLUTION

Enterprise-grade solution that has given greater control over different platforms and for different companies on the network layer. Automated provisioning and security that has helped to speed up production cycle.

BUSINESS BENEFITS

- Faster time to market
- Reducing administrative overheads
- Services configured securely through automation

Operating in the highly competitive and fast-paced online lottery market, Smartgames Technologies Limited is a shared services company helping drive continuous innovation at Zeal Network SE Group, one of world's leading interactive lottery companies. Smartgames is critical to a number of key business units that rely heavily on its solutions to quickly launch new and disruptive products and services and generate revenue streams across the business. To help Smartgames deliver a quicker time to market, whilst maintaining optimum levels of security, it turned to VMware to provide an agile, flexible and secure infrastructure that ensures it can meet the ever-increasing demands of the business. VMware enabled Smartgames to automate the creation and deployment of virtual machines and implement scalable micro-segmentation security protocols – ensuring Zeal Network SE Group maintains its competitive edge and continues its strategy as THE disruptor in the Lottery industry.

Smartgames Technologies Limited is a shared services company within the ZEAL Network SE Group. ZEAL is an international group of world leading interactive lottery companies, dedicated to creating an exciting and entertaining online lottery experience. Zeal offers consumer-facing lottery-based games as well as B2B solutions worldwide, employing more than 300 people across its bases in London, Madrid, and Hamburg. Zeal has paid out over €1.3billion in jackpot winnings since starting in 1999.

The challenge

To allow Zeal to continue its work as a disruptor in the online lottery business, Smartgames knew it needed to enhance its existing IT infrastructure. Thanks to its legacy data centre infrastructure the dynamic services that the business units were demanding, and at the pace they were required, were simply not attainable. The organisation was faced with a slow production cycle and a stagnant customer experience, which subsequently meant Smartgames could not deliver new services quickly enough for the Zeal business units.

“The lottery business is incredibly fast-paced with competitors delivering new services at very high rates. It is vital for us to be able to deliver new services quickly and effectively. We couldn't follow the demand for development as quickly as the business units wanted new services. Our network was pretty slow, and administrative overheads were very high – essentially, our infrastructure was outdated,” said Bernd Malmqvist, Tech Lead Systems Operations, Smartgames Technologies.

“VMware has been an amazing partner for Smartgames. They have been mission critical for us in providing solutions that increase innovation and improve speed to market, whilst simultaneously mitigating risks.”

PAUL DINGWITZ
HEAD OF TECHNOLOGY, MANAGING DIRECTOR
SMARTGAMES TECHNOLOGIES

VMWARE FOOTPRINT

- VMware vSphere 6.5
- VMware NSX 6.3.4
- VMware vSAN 6.0

The IT environment at Smartgames had become very complicated to run and manage. As the internal IT provider to an innovation-driven business that grows through acquisition, Smartgames needed an agile infrastructure that was quick to respond to the business needs as well as being quick to scale.

The company decided to move towards an OpenStack solution to speed up provisioning of network services and application deployment to development teams back in 2015, on recommendation from many of the business units, but this had its complications.

“We realised a lot of the enterprise-class features we expected from OpenStack were not there,” said Bernd. “Crucially, the services that we required were not available to us on OpenStack, so if we had any issues, we didn’t have someone jumping in to solve the problem, despite a highly-skilled in-house technical team. It was a good product, but we couldn’t scale it to suit our business requirements,” he added.

The solution

To continue to deliver market-leading services, Smartgames required an enterprise-grade solution that would help the company gain greater control over its different platforms, enabling it to distinguish between the different companies in the ZEAL group at the network layer.

Smartgames had already been a VMware vSphere customer prior to the challenges the company faced with its datacentre infrastructure. For this reason, it was well aware of VMware NSX as a potential solution that would help it increase efficiency, become more compliant and manage IT workloads across the estate.

“The automation that vSphere gave us was critical, enabling us to create virtual machines automatically and we wanted the same level of automation throughout the cycle of creating machines, deploying applications and creating firewalls,” said Bernd.

“After the failed OpenStack project, we successfully completed a proof of concept with NSX and quickly found that everything we had on the network, system and development side was fulfilled within the VMware stack,” he explained.

The company is currently running VMware vSphere 6.5 and VMware NSX 6.3.4, while it has also been a user of VMware vSAN to select parts of its environment. Selecting NSX was part of a wider shift for the entire company in transforming its datacentres from physical estates into software-defined datacentres (SDDC).

“We wanted to achieve the SDDC vision laid out by VMware, which is why we upgraded the network layer with NSX,” Bernd said.

Business results & benefits

Automation was one of the key considerations for Smartgames when selecting both vSphere and NSX. vSphere has enabled the company to automatically spin up new virtual machines and deploy them with a quicker time to market. The deployment of new services in the old system used to take two weeks, it now only takes a matter of hours. Thanks to NSX, the development team can create new platforms and ensure they are quickly secured against threats.

NSX provides Smartgames with the flexibility and agility required to deliver a scalable, robust and secure network to deal with the demands of the

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BERND MALMQVIST
TECH LEAD SYSTEMS OPERATIONS
SMARTGAMES TECHNOLOGIES

constantly-expanding development environment. Now, the company can meet the business units' demands, delivering faster provisioning and app deployment services to developers across its internal customers. This enables the business units to get new products and services to market quickly, keeping ZEAL ahead of the competition.

NSX has allowed the company to automatically configure new services securely, independent of each business unit or as a collective unit, enabling logical management from a high-level to determine the firewalls each service requires.

“Micro-segmentation using NSX enables us to mitigate our risks by creating a distinction between different applications on different platforms for different companies,” said Bernd. “Our firewalls have to be dynamic, so that the network can configure itself after the development and deployment phase.”

NSX isn't just helping Smartgames to deploy new services; it is reducing complexity with networking and security, which in turn is reducing administrative overheads as the company can rely on in-house expertise and resources. By not having to handle administrative activities, employee productivity is boosted across the IT team, allowing greater scope for the development of new business models.

“Even normal tasks that were completed by network engineers are now done by system engineers because it's easier for them to manage the systems. Our network engineers now have the time to work on more business-critical projects, rather than day-to-day-running, helping to increase revenue opportunities for the business units” said Bernd.

“The combination of vSphere 6.5 and NSX 6.3 has given us several benefits, including the ability to deploy the whole production cycle in less than 20 minutes which wasn't possible with our old environment. Previously we would have had to completely rebuild the whole production cycle for each business unit,” he added.

Looking ahead

Smartgames has already virtualized one of its two UK based data centres and is currently in the process of virtualizing its second facility. Thereafter, the company will be looking to use cloud services including NSX on AWS.

“It is still early days as cloud is something we've just started looking at, but we want to use something that can streamline how we do our networking and futureproof our businesses going forward,” he said.

