



ALLIANT CREDIT UNION SUPPORTS AWARD-WINNING MOBILE BANKING SERVICES WITH VMWARE



INDUSTRY
BANKING (NONPROFIT)

LOCATION
CHICAGO

KEY CHALLENGES

- Improve infrastructure reliability to support modern banking
- Enhance security around online and mobile banking transactions
- Increase visibility to streamline audits and compliance

SOLUTION

To provide members with cutting-edge digital banking services, Alliant Credit Union upgraded its data center infrastructure with VMware vSphere Enterprise and used VMware NSX, vRealize Suite, and Horizon to improve security, visibility, and user experiences.

BUSINESS BENEFITS

- Provides better customer banking experiences
- Improves network and data security with micro-segmentation
- Enhances compliance and operations by providing full visibility
- Enables proactive maintenance to keep services fast and available

As the banking industry shifts from brick-and-mortar to digital, more customers want virtual transactions and rely less on in-branch interactions. Credit union members expect banking to keep pace with their busy lives, and demand for new and expanded services is transforming the industry. Alliant Credit Union is responding with easy-to-use tools for mobile and online banking, allowing members to bank on their own time and avoid waiting in lines.

In order to support new digital services and change how its 335,000 members engage with the business, Alliant Credit Union needed to shift to a more secure, reliable infrastructure. Using VMware vSphere® Enterprise and VMware NSX® along with VMware vRealize® Suite and VMware Horizon® virtual desktops, the credit union can quickly develop and deliver reliable online services to support members' daily transactions and long-term financial goals.

Organization Overview

Alliant Credit Union was founded in 1935 by a small group of United Airlines employees. As the seventh-largest U.S. credit union based on asset size, Alliant serves more than 335,000 members nationwide and manages over \$10 billion in assets. Its product and service lines include savings, checking, IRAs, credit cards, student and home loans, retirement and investment services, and financial counseling.

The Challenge

Like any bank, Alliant's security requirements are always changing. To continue evolving its digital products, the credit union needed better visibility into its infrastructure to support ongoing audits and compliance with federal regulations and industry standards. It also wanted to take a more granular approach to network security to protect its members against a data breach.

Legacy infrastructure caused operational issues, as well—network bottlenecks often caused timeouts with the nightly data warehouse load, which took four hours to complete each time it was restarted. Sending data offsite for disaster recovery sometimes stalled, as well, requiring manual intervention from IT staff.

"We wanted to modernize our data center and transform security by taking our network from the physical world to the virtual world, where we could have much better control," says Julio Arevalo, manager of systems engineering at Alliant Credit Union. "We also wanted an environment that would be easier to maintain, saving us time and money."

In addition, Alliant wanted to empower its employees with more consistent digital workspaces and move away from the complexity of virtual private network (VPN) remote access and Citrix-based application virtualization. “We were getting too many support tickets from unhappy users because their application settings weren’t being retained or remote access wasn’t reliable,” says Scott Namovicz, senior systems engineer at Alliant Credit Union.

The Solution

Already a vSphere customer for server virtualization, Alliant decided to use NSX for network virtualization and security. By embedding security functions into the hypervisor, NSX delivers micro-segmentation and granular security policies to each individual workload. Security policies travel with the workloads, eliminating the need for multiple hardware-based firewalls. Using NSX, the credit union can isolate sensitive systems, such as its mobile banking application, and demonstrate compliance with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) and other regulations.

“We do everything we can to make sure member assets are secure, and NSX allows us to take a much more granular, policy-driven approach,” says Arevalo.

Alliant also uses the NSX load balancing features as well as guest introspection, which improves performance for VMware host servers while keeping virtual machines malware-free. By offloading security functions to a dedicated security appliance on each host, guest introspection removes the need for an antivirus agent within the guest operating system.

The credit union took the opportunity to upgrade and streamline its underlying infrastructure with vSphere Enterprise 6.0 and now 6.5 in both its data centers. For 360-degree visibility across virtual and physical infrastructure, it deployed VMware vRealize Operations™, vRealize Log Insight™, and vRealize Network Insight™.

“The business always wants to know what we’re currently using and what we’re going to need in the future,” says Arevalo. “With vRealize Suite, it’s easy to make sure our resources are properly allocated and produce reports for intelligent operations and better capacity planning.”

Alliant also began moving away from Citrix technology to Horizon, beginning with 100 virtual desktops for developers. The ability to use NSX for Horizon to create security policies that dynamically follow end users on their virtual desktops is a boon for security, says Namovicz: “We can tightly secure Horizon virtual desktops with NSX, allowing users to access only what they need.”

“VMware paves the way for innovation with products we can easily integrate, making our jobs easier,” adds Arevalo. “And their professional services give us the confidence to rely on VMware products.”

Business Results and Benefits

By modernizing its data center with a more secure, reliable infrastructure, Alliant provides members with better experiences as well as the peace of mind that their assets are safe. Data warehouse loads are faster and more reliable, and replication operations no longer time out. With seamless integration across environments and transparency into systems and processes, Alliant now has the visibility it needs to comply with quarterly audits. Up-to-date dashboards, comprehensive reports, and proactive alerts allow IT to respond quickly to any issues and avoid delays that could impact front-end operations.

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JULIO AREVALO
MANAGER OF SYSTEMS ENGINEERING
ALLIANT CREDIT UNION

VMWARE FOOTPRINT

- Dell EMC VxRail 6.5
- VMware vSphere 6.0 / 6.5 Enterprise
- VMware NSX 6.3.5
- VMware vRealize Suite
 - vRealize Network Insight 3.5
 - vRealize Operations 6.6.1
 - vRealize Log Insight 4.3.0
- VMware Horizon 7.4
- VMware Professional Services

APPLICATIONS VIRTUALIZED

- Online and mobile banking applications
- Microsoft SQL Server databases

“Without VMware, we would have to spend more time and money trying to keep up with growth and customer demand,” says Arevalo. “Change is inevitable, and VMware gives us innovative solutions like NSX that allow us to embrace the changes that are transforming banking while reducing business risk.”

Alliant is now rolling out Horizon virtual desktops to approximately 75 percent of its nearly 600 employees and plans to use VMware Unified Access Gateway instead of a VPN for remote access.

“With Horizon, we’re able to give our developers and business users the best possible virtual desktop experience,” says Namovicz. “It’s better for IT, too—I can log in from anywhere using two-factor authentication, do any management tasks I need to do, and solve problems quickly.”

A more secure and flexible environment combined with better tools for developers helps Alliant build, maintain, and support top-quality services. In fact, its mobile banking services have been recognized by online industry journal The Financial Brand and personal finance sites NerdWallet and GOBankingRates.

“By giving us the tools to segment and monitor our environment to keep workloads secure and service quality high, VMware helps us offer digital services that compete with the big banks,” says Arevalo.

Looking Ahead

In the near future, Alliant plans to integrate NSX with VMware vRealize Automation™ to enable DevOps and provide its developers with self-service—a capability it already successfully demonstrated during an internal hackathon. It’s also considering using VMware Workspace ONE™ to provide employees with even more flexible digital workspaces and plans to leverage VMware Cloud™ on AWS to move vSphere workloads to the cloud.

“Moving to the cloud will be another big change, and once again, VMware will make it easier for us because we can use the tools we’re used to and security policies we already have set up,” says Arevalo.

