An efficient cost/benefit ratio thanks to a multi-cloud strategy and links between on-premises and hybrid-cloud solutions

Flexible, on-demand infrastructure scaling

Fast, flexible and agile access to valuable data analytics

A strong position in the fiercely competitive market research environment

How GfK, a leading data analytics and recommendations provider is leveraging the hybrid cloud to revolutionize market research

GfK is a global leader in data and analytics for the consumer products industry. Born of what used to be "Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung" (the "Society for Consumer Research"), its acronym today stands for "Growth from Knowledge". To further reinforce its competitive position and press ahead with digitalization, the company has opted for a hybrid-cloud model using VMware Cloud™ on AWS and VMware Cloud Foundation™. Now armed with a successful blend of on-premises and cloud-based solutions, GfK is enjoying greater flexibility, agility and cost efficiency than it has ever known. This kind of forward-looking technology helps cement its position as a unique and strategically important partner in the field of data analytics and market research.

GfK: globally trusted data and analytics partner since 1934

Founded originally as a consumer research society in 1934, GfK is today a global leader in data and analytics for the consumer products industry. Headquartered in Nuremberg, the company's approximately 8,000 staff provide over 10,000 clients in more than 60

Growth from Knowledge

GfK SE is the globally trusted data and analytics partner, founded in 1934 and headquartered in Nuremberg (Germany). The company today employs over 8,000 people around the globe and operates in over 60 countries. For more information about GfK, please visit www.gfk.com

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countries with valuable insights into market and consumer behavior. With over 85 years of expertise, GfK stands out as a world-renowned consultant on customer satisfaction and purchasing patterns. Quality and trust are at the core of all it does. Therefore, it is only logical that GfK moves with the times. GfK is committed to developing and advancing innovative methods and measuring technologies as new drivers for its clients' day-to-day success. In 2020, for example, the company launched an AI-based platform by the name of gfknewron that delivers revolutionary insights and actionable recommendations at speed.

Innovation – a challenge and an obligation

For over 85 years, the global leader in data and analytics GfK has been supplying its clients with optimized decision inputs. Using scientific methodologies to link data together and combining that with a wealth of experience and the company's in-house database – covering more than 15 million tracked products groups and over two million target group panels in 15 countries – GfK has become the partner of choice for numerous global players. "We supply our clients around the globe with relevant data and support them as they move toward digitalization," notes Ismar Efendic, IT Infrastructure Manager at GfK. Modern software architecture and tools are an added bonus. Programmable infrastructures such as Infrastructure as Code (IaC) are likewise gaining in importance in the industry. "We know that the right IT solution is essential if we want to give the market what it needs," Efendic says. "In this fiercely competitive market, speed is everything: Fast results and applications are tremendously important – although good quality is equally critical." GfK delivers the data that drives better business decisions. It has been growing by 20 percent per annum in terms of data volume. The biggest challenge, however, was untangling an obsolete IT system made of so many different infrastructure silos. The initial focus was on dealing with an assortment of cloud providers that drove up costs and presented an obstacle to flexible, scalable utilization. Both GfK and its clients knew that success in this market derives from the constant development of new, innovative methods and measuring technologies. To improve, reinforce and consolidate the company's positioning in this hotly contested market environment, GfK thus proposed consciously adopting a future-oriented digital strategy.

Exacting demands for top outcomes – how a hybrid cloud solution made life easier

In its capacity as a strategic and technical partner, VMware has been walking GfK along its path through digital transformation for over a decade. "We are a demanding and singularly dynamic customer, which is why a close partnership with VMware is integral to the success of everyone involved," Efendic explains. "After all, we promise our clients 'Growth through Knowledge' based on our technical expertise. Which means that we need to be efficient and right up to date." Four years ago, the Nuremberg-based researcher expanded its on-premises infrastructure by introducing VMware vRealize® Automation. In doing so, it laid a solid foundation for a modern infrastructure – partly with a view to ramping up IaC.

The resultant self-service hybrid-cloud environment and self-service automation slashed the complexity of the IT landscape, putting in place an automation platform that would support development operations.

"Our overriding goal was to create the scalability and stable provisioning of a cloud infrastructure, especially for our on-premises applications," Efendic recalls. "And that is why we have continually upgraded our VMware vRealize Automation in recent years, finally to the VMware vRealize Suite." By expanding on the basis of VMware Cloud on AWS and VMware Cloud Foundation 4.0 with vRealize Cloud Management, GfK has given itself a secure infrastructure and consistent operations by efficiently operating processes, policies, people and tools in both private and public cloud environments. "One important and, above all, lucrative step involved migrating from multiple cloud providers to just a single one," Efendic goes on. Assisted by his 60-strong international core infrastructure team, the manager was able to eliminate the broad spectrum of IT infrastructure silos. The team consciously chose VMware: "We have been partners for years, and we work together to develop the best solutions for what we need," is Efendic's take. "VMware is the market leader for on-premises and hybrid-cloud solutions, so it was only logical to tackle the next project for the future together." The technical history that the market research professionals share with VMware was indeed a huge advantage: Migration to the modern VMware-based environment was launched and integrated in existing hardware simply and smoothly in April 2020.

> "VMware is the market leader for on-premise and multi-cloud solutions and a strategically important partner to help GfK assert itself in the fiercely competitive market research space."
>
> ISMAR EFENDIC
> IT INFRASTRUCTURE MANAGER, GfK

Going forward, GfK's new hybrid cloud model will establish a harmonized core system complete with VMware Cloud on AWS, VMware Cloud Foundation with vRealize Cloud Management and a volume rising from an initial 500 VMs to a total of 4,000 VMs. Modernizing its data center also gives the company an efficient platform for ongoing innovation. "We are modernizing, protecting and scaling our applications with the world's leading hybrid cloud solution: VMware Cloud on AWS," Efendic affirms. "We aimed to go live by the end of 2020 and complete the whole migration by end-2021. And we are well on the way."

A pioneering tradition: how the hybrid cloud makes GfK faster and more flexible

The relentless modernization and adaptation of its business model enables the tradition-rich market researcher to defend its position even in today's fast-paced, data-driven age. "We have no trouble migrating our many and varied applications from the public to the private cloud – or vice versa – and we can also run them within our own infrastructure," says a clearly excited Efendic. "Our clients therefore benefit from unrivaled speed and flexibility." The hybrid cloud-based infrastructure also empowers GfK to respond to new and future projects with astonishing agility: Resources can now be shifted quickly and easily from the private to the public cloud – without modifying the nature of interaction with the environment. The gfknewron project is a good example: This, the company's latest AI-powered product is based exclusively on public cloud technology. And the consistency guaranteed by VMware Cloud on AWS eases the burden on both regular staff and the IT team. Better still: Since the teams are already familiar with the VMware environment, the learning curve for new skills is decidedly short.

"Times to market are shorter, scalability is enhanced and ultimately the total cost can be reduced," Efendic explains. "Security and governance are likewise ramped up, downtime is reduced and the integrity of applications is preserved." Optimized load balancing allows such peaks to be absorbed with consummate efficiency. At the same time, flexible scalability lets extra hosts be added and surplus hosts removed at any time. GfK can access AWS' modern, cloud-native applications such as data analytics and hybrid applications and thereby maintain a position of strength in its competitive market environment. One very important point for the market researcher was that VMware Cloud on AWS constituted an investment in future-proof technology that will stay relevant going forward. Why? Because the new cloud-based infrastructure comprising VMware Cloud on AWS and VMware Cloud Foundation forges a successful link between on-premises and cloud-based solutions. That in turn enables GfK to efficiently develop its own modern applications and solutions.

"In market research, everything is data-driven," Efendic says. "So, we need the best technological basis to efficiently process large volumes of data and consistently distill them into logical insights that genuinely benefit the client." The new hybrid-cloud solution means limits on storage capacity are a thing of the past. Nor is there any need for new hardware, all of which eliminates what are now unnecessary costs. Ismar Efendic puts his philosophy in a nutshell: "'Deliver on time and on quality' is our credo, because we want efficient data to help our clients make better business decisions exactly in the moment where they need to." In the past, it could take several days or even weeks to process customer inquiries. Today, valuable insights can be gained in real time. Yet on top of its new-found speed and flexibility, GfK is now also able to manage even large data projects efficiently. Excellent data management skills and data quality have earned the company the trust of numerous global players. Now, the multi-cloud strategy is steering GfK away from the traditional market research space surrounding descriptive, static data and toward top-class analytics, AI-driven forecasts and recommendations for action. A company with an over 85-year history is thus morphing into a tech-enabled service provider that empowers its clients to make better business decisions than ever – all while improving the efficiency of its own sales and marketing activities.

Focused on digital transformation

"Our future projects with VMware will include CloudHealth and the HCI Kit 6, for example," Efendic says. "The next step will be to give our developers a series of new services that can all be made available both locally and in the cloud. That will boost their productivity and further ease their workload." One element will be the VMware Cloud Foundation add-on for Kubernetes, which will let Kubernetes clusters be made available quickly to GfK's teams of developers. "We transform data and information into actionable knowledge that serves as a sustainable driver of business growth," Efendic notes. "VMware Cloud on AWS is an investment in a platform that leaves us well prepared for whatever the future may hold." This winning combination of knowledge and the right dynamic IT environment means that the market research and data analytics expert can provide outstanding support for clients as they advance toward digital transformation.

Fast, flexible and consistently #innovative - @VMware Cloud on AWS and VMware Cloud Foundation are an investment in @GfK's own future - and invaluable #business decision aids for its clients