Suffolk County Protects USD 60 Billion of Real Estate Transactions

Suffolk County Government serves more than 1.5 million constituents across the eastern end of Long Island and other nearby islands in the state of New York. It provides citizen services such as education, social care and transport, and supports local businesses and tourism.

Industry
Government

Strategic priorities
Anywhere Workspace

VMware footprint
- VMware® Horizon®
- VMware NSX® Advanced Load Balancer™
- VMware NSX Gateway Firewall™
- VMware Technical Adoption Management Services™

The Clerk's Office in Suffolk County is the busiest in New York State, managing vast volumes of records and generating USD $700 Million in annual revenue from real estate as a result of USD $60 billion in real estate transactions. To mitigate the risks of natural disasters impacting business continuity, the office launched a strategy to go digital by 2025, including establishing virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) on a secure network for seven hundred employees with VMware technology. When the pandemic hit without warning, the office switched to remote work in just hours. Not only could staff work from anywhere, but the real estate boom also brought a record-breaking USD $60 billion to the county in just two years. Capitalizing on its success, the county is scaling up the VDI to support 10,000 remote users across the state.

New York State's busiest Clerk's office

Suffolk County Government is responsible for 1.5 million constituents. The Clerk's Office manages paperwork relating to property, business and the courts, including processing real estate transactions and maintaining records dating back to 1650.

Suffolk County Clerk, Judith Pascale, is the second woman in history to hold office and has driven some of the biggest digital innovations in her state. These include, but are not limited to, the virtual elimination of all paper associated with land records and court documents, or tens of millions of pages. Her 2022 strategy outlines several technology-focused goals such as improving constituent services and breaking free of the limits of the brick-and-mortar office.

Ultimately, that requires more digital services and digital documents that are available from anywhere. What started as a proactive initiative to ensure business continuity in the event of extreme weather conditions, in turn kicked off a project to revolutionize how the office will begin to do business now and in the future.

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Failing to adapt to remote work rapidly would have caused the entire real estate industry to come to a grounding halt, but with hundreds of endpoints in people's homes, the organization also needed to ensure data was well protected from cyberattacks.

"We needed to pivot a very active public building and hundreds of users to remote access in just a matter of days. Protecting remote devices was of paramount concern to make sure people could access critical land records without risking a security breach," explains Schlussler. The team also needed to consider how to secure and optimize its network to support a remote environment.

In addition to internal staff processing transactions, hundreds of realtors also rely on the system. The demand for acquiring real estate has soared as many have moved to the county from the city. The Clerk's Office needed a seamless digital solution—and fast.

Establishing a secure VDI

The Clerk's Office partnered with VMware to implement a virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) for seven hundred users. Working with a VMware Technical Adoption Manager brought the skills and knowledge to ensure a smooth implementation.

Suffolk County installed VMware Horizon on Dell VxRail to create a secure, anywhere workspace, using VMware NSX Advanced Load Balancer to ensure flexible deployment and simplified control. To deliver on its end-to-end Zero Trust security strategy, the Clerk's Office implemented VMware Carbon Black Cloud.

The solution proactively protects physical hardware for the entire environment, particularly important for mitigating the threat of ransomware and other cyberattacks. If a workstation in the VDI becomes infected, the team can simply quarantine the device to stop malicious attacks from infecting the network.

Finally, the hybrid digital ecosystem of the Clerk's Office and County IT is protected by VMware NSX Gateway Firewall, a software-defined solution that provides Suffolk County consistent network security coverage and unified management for all its workloads.

"Empowering staff and partners to work from anywhere with VMware saved the real estate industry during the pandemic and generated revenue of USD $60 billion. Now it's making it easier for people to work with the government."

Judith Pascale, County Clerk, Suffolk County Government

Safeguarding business continuity

In total, 90 percent of municipal revenue comes from real estate transactions. This funds local infrastructure projects and state quality of life initiatives and protecting the revenue stream relies on business continuity and highly available systems.

When the pandemic hit in 2020, the Clerk's Office at Suffolk County faced two challenges: ensuring staff could continue working in a safe environment and protecting revenues from real estate. Luckily, it had already kicked off an initiative to digitalize and modernize operations and create a frictionless customer experience.

"We recognized the need to break free from the physical constraints of the office and use technology to make data and services more accessible years ago," says Peter Schlussler, IT director for Suffolk County. "We started digitizing records, but convincing stakeholders to invest in upgrading our infrastructure was a challenge."

The pandemic work-from-home order provided the perfect opportunity to get buy-in to accelerate the digital roadmap.

"VMware saved the real estate sector and now it's making it easier for people to work with the government. The end game is for the Clerk's Office to become a transparent layer bringing the government closer to its people."

Judith Pascale, County Clerk, Suffolk County Government

Providing 700 users with a frictionless experience

Users can now log in concurrently from anywhere with zero downtime. The transition from working in the office to being able to log in seamlessly from home was complete in a matter of hours.

"The VDI looks the same as my workspace in the office, so I didn't have to learn a whole new system. I can log in and perform all my tasks with the right documents without leaving home," explains Jackie Karlin, title abstractor, Suffolk County.

If users need support, the Horizon Help Desk Tool gives the IT team access to system status metrics and troubleshooting capabilities remotely. They can also manage access and ensure users have a standard interface and apps, which makes the environment easier to maintain.

"As a government organization, we have limited resources to serve people's basic needs. Thanks to standardization, it's easier for us to manage user devices with VMware Horizon than it was to maintain physical desktops at the office," says Schlussler.

Safeguarding annual revenues of USD 700 million

In 2021, the VDI enabled internal and external users to process almost USD 1 trillion of real estate transactions as both residential and commercial property in the region changed hands. This generated a record-breaking annual revenue of USD $700 million for two years running.

In fact, the team accelerated revenue collecting by 25-30 percent during the pandemic. Work can be completed in hours, where previously it would have required a trip to the office to track down the right documents. In total, user delivery services increased by 35-40 percent.

"The pandemic could have been a disaster for our office if we hadn't already been working towards modernizing our environment, but our foresight and strong partnership with VMware got us through. Our Technical Account Manager is very invested in our success," says Schlussler. "VMware Technical Adoption Management Services were also invaluable when we needed support."

Now, as more data and applications are moved to VDI, citizens and other partners will benefit from secure, round-the-clock access to documents. The Clerk's Office has also slashed hardware costs by 20 percent by moving to a virtualized environment, and it's in a strong position to evaluate hybrid working policies for more vital services.

"VMware saved the real estate sector and now it's making it easier for people to work with the government. The end game is for the Clerk's Office to become a transparent layer bringing the government closer to its people," explains Pascale.

Scaling remote services to up to 10,000 external users

Following the success of the initial rollout, the Clerk's Office is creating a scalable greenfield environment with VMware Horizon to onboard more services and implement best practices. The team is leveraging Dell VxRail across two of its data centers and building VMware Horizon Cloud pods on-premises to support better performance and scalability. This will also enhance disaster recovery in the event of a physical event impacting either data center.