



Grinnell Mutual Saves \$1 Million in Infrastructure Costs with VMware Cloud Foundation

Founded in 1909 and headquartered in Grinnell, Iowa, [Grinnell Mutual](#) has been a trusted source of quality insurance for more than a century. Offering auto, farm and business insurance, the company is the largest primary reinsurer of farm mutual companies in North America and the largest reinsurer of county mutuals in the United States, serving more than 1,700 local agencies and brokers.

Industry

Insurance

VMware footprint

- VMware® Cloud Foundation®
- VMware vSphere Kubernetes Service
- VMware Data Services Manager
- VMware vDefend™
- VMware Avi™ Load Balancer

To accelerate the delivery of new application features for insurance customers and agents, Grinnell Mutual needed to modernize software development, overcoming years of technology debt. As a cornerstone of its strategy, the IT team built a self-service modern private cloud with VMware Cloud Foundation from Broadcom. Developers now have self-service access to essential resources in the development environment. Meanwhile, the IT team has successfully enhanced security, streamlined IT management and reduced costs while supporting greater enterprise collaboration.

Protecting customers when they need it most

Across the midwestern United States, farmers, business owners and community members rely on Grinnell Mutual to protect them from the devastating financial consequences of unexpected events, from car accidents to tornadoes. The insurer's 750 employees help safeguard what their customers grow, own, build and value.

Although the Iowa-based company has been in business for well over a century, technology plays a vital role in enabling its outstanding service for mutual members, policyholders and agents. "My team provides technology that allows agents to help our customers in their most vulnerable moments," says Jeremy Wright, director of IT infrastructure, Grinnell Mutual.

"Using vSAN instead of a discrete storage appliance could save over a million dollars a year. And that's just the start. VMware Cloud Foundation is going to change every hardware lease and software renewal conversation that we have in the next three to five years. All I see are possibilities for saving money."

Jeremy Wright, Director of IT Infrastructure, Grinnell Mutual



Confronting tech debt and the need for modernization

The Grinnell Mutual IT team works continuously to produce new software capabilities, but a lot of legacy technology debt remains. Wright's team struggled for a long time to support developers with a more modern development cycle.

Grinnell Mutual's developers wanted to take advantage of containerization, which can speed the delivery of new software features. Finding the right type of cloud environment was key. "We had been using various SaaS platforms, but we didn't have any control over those public cloud environments," says Wright. "We wanted to give our developers a native cloud experience on-premises."

Modernizing development with VMware Cloud Foundation

To create the right conditions for developing modern, containerized applications, Grinnell Mutual built a self-service private cloud model on VMware Cloud Foundation. With the platform, the IT team can offer developers the benefits of public cloud services with the control and security of a private cloud.

"VMware Cloud Foundation enables us to implement a true self-service model for developers using on-premises technology powered by vSphere Kubernetes Service and VCF Automation," says Wright. "For the first time, they can deploy applications—whether it's test, dev or production—without having to think about infrastructure. That's a total game-changer."

Grinnell Mutual is now modernizing its integrated development environment (IDE), which will help developers stay focused on creating new application features. "It's all about giving time back to the developer," says Wright. His team will containerize the IDE and then deliver it to developers using VMware vSphere Kubernetes Service via VMware Cloud Foundation Automation. With vSphere Kubernetes Service, the Grinnell Mutual IT team can leverage the benefits of latest CNCF-certified Kubernetes innovations, fast and consistent cluster deployment, unified networking and security, and simplified lifecycle management across a modern private cloud platform. Developers gained a reliable, self-service environment that accelerates time to value. Also, the Grinnell Mutual IT team can provide IDE-as-a-Service, where developers can provision a vSphere Namespace and deploy the containerized IDE directly into it as a self-service catalog item via VCF Automation.

The VMware platform also helps other team members, such as database administrators (DBAs), better support application development. With VMware Data Services Manager, integrated with VCF Automation, DBAs can use Database as a Service (DBaaS) to easily deliver new services to developers on premises. Wright observes that as a result, DBAs are working with developers more productively than before.

Now Grinnell Mutual's network, systems, DevOps, DBA, desktop automation and telecom teams all collaborate on the same platform. "VMware Cloud Foundation is a unifier for us," says Wright. "It's an exciting opportunity for all of us to engineer together."

Importantly, Grinnell Mutual can foster this collaboration while keeping the team compact. "VMware Cloud Foundation allows us to capture the full power of a private cloud with a small team," says Wright. "I would definitely need more headcount with additional skills to achieve the same benefits in a public cloud."

Grinnell Mutual's IT team worked with VMware partner 27 Virtual to successfully implement VMware Cloud Foundation. Wright found 27 Virtual to be extremely flexible in its approach to Grinnell Mutual's deployment planning throughout the architecture conceptualization process. "The fact that they listened to our needs and presented us with multiple options for deploying and managing our workloads was very important to us," he says.



Eliminating management complexity with a unified platform

The VMware Cloud Foundation takes the complexity and silos out of infrastructure management—unifying networking, storage and compute—which is extremely helpful for Grinnell Mutual’s 17-member IT team. This integration makes it easier for the team to service the infrastructure and frees up time to spend on more strategic initiatives.

Managing individual infrastructure elements is no longer siloed and time-consuming. “VMware vSAN Express Storage Architecture (ESA) is so easy to manage that we almost don’t have to think about what’s going on with our storage—it’s just ready and available to use” says Wright. With VMware NSX, the network and systems teams gain a more holistic view across the network and infrastructure.

Grinnell Mutual uses the distributed firewall capability in VMware vDefend to step up application protection while keeping management burdens to a minimum. Says Wright, “We can tag workloads and not have to deal with IP addresses anymore. That’s powerful because it allows us to automate workload protection, which makes security easier for our small team.”

Saving money with a private cloud

Wright anticipates that moving to an on-premises private cloud with VMware Cloud Foundation will help generate short- and long-term IT savings for Grinnell Mutual. “Using vSAN instead

of a discrete storage appliance could save over a million dollars a year. And that’s just the start,” says Wright. “VMware Cloud Foundation is going to change every hardware lease and software renewal conversation that we have in the next three to five years. All I see are possibilities for saving money.”

Exploring new features to support better customer service

Next, the IT team plans to explore VMware Avi Load Balancer and VMware vDefend Advanced Threat Prevention. “I see a ton of value in Broadcom’s advanced VMware security and modern load balancing solutions, not just from a security and resiliency stance but also from a financial standpoint,” says Wright.

Meanwhile, the team will upgrade to the latest VMware Cloud Foundation version to take advantage of new capabilities.

Grinnell Mutual’s IT team is eager to capitalize on modern technology features, without losing sight of the big picture. “All of these internal changes are ultimately going to help our customers—like the person who is sitting on the side of the road with a wrecked car. We’re helping them quickly report a claim and upload a photo using their mobile phone,” says Wright. “VMware Cloud Foundation makes it easier for us to deliver those better customer experiences. We can worry less about the infrastructure and solve more significant problems.”

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