



Liffery tests new microservices with full flexibility

The IONOS Startup Program has given Liffery a robust and scalable architecture plus financial support to develop their AI-powered research assistant.

- The financial and technical support provided by the [IONOS Startup Program](#) allows Liffery to spin up and kill microservices quickly and cheaply, in order to test new ideas cost-effectively.
- The Data Center Designer not only saves time creating virtual infrastructure, but its visual interface also makes the infrastructure easier for everyone on the team to understand.
- Liffery found it could easily provision additional resources using the tool, something that is much harder to achieve using hyperscale providers.



Away from all the noise and adverts online, Liffery provides a quiet space where users can capture and consider sparks of interest for later. Its applications include individual and collaborative research as well as social wish lists between family and friends. As the platform transitioned from beta testing to a full launch, it needed a robust and scalable infrastructure. IONOS provided that and more: Liffery found that the ability to spin up infrastructure quickly using a visual interface saved time and money, and enabled them to experiment freely with new features. With support from the IONOS Startup Program, Liffery was able to focus on building its solution without worrying about the cost, and had access to expert technical support whenever an issue arose.

The challenges

From beta to “Hello world!”

“We initially wanted to solve the problem of unwanted Christmas gifts,” said John Carmichael, “Christmas came and went, people were happy with their presents, but they carried on using our tool... and this is where it all began”.

He’s talking about Liffery, where he is the CEO. It’s an on-line, personal research assistant for individual and collaborative research that he co-founded with Janine Nitz, who manages communications and product development as the CCO. The tool gives you a calm, ad-free space to build up channels on different topics from furniture to fashion to travel, and of course, the original idea, wish lists.

The social aspect allows you to share channels with specific groups of people, maybe a wish list for your family or a new furniture-research-channel between you and your partner. Liffery is all about being a useful tool, and with the shopping list feature you can also mark items that you’re getting or giving to someone else, so nobody else buys the same thing.

“We looked into the decision-making process that people go through for a purchase and realised that it exists in a very broken system,” says Nitz. “There’s a lot of exploration and evaluation that everyone naturally goes through. But in terms of digital marketing today, it’s all about pushing people through a funnel as aggressively and as quickly as possible.”

She adds: “If you’re being aggressively targeted all the time, it takes away from the nice aspect of actually finding something that you like and buying it. We wanted to forge a quiet space for people to keep the initial sparks of interest that they have so they can consider them in their own time when they’re in shopping mode and when they’re ready to make a decision.”

Alongside the service for individuals, Liffery offers a service for businesses. It provides a feature-rich wish list sidebar for any website and gives companies data on their competitors, and on how their own products are being considered by customers.

Following a year-long beta with both shoppers and businesses, a big launch was top of Liffery’s own wish



list. “We’re about to say ‘hello’ to the world, and it’s good to go with the help of the IONOS Startup Program,” says Carmichael.

The company needed infrastructure to support its growth, and financial support and technical expertise to help it launch successfully.

The solution

Free cloud services support innovation

The IONOS Startup Program supports new companies with free cloud services, expert consultancy and joint marketing activities. “It allowed us to explore and test IONOS infrastructure without worrying about costs,” Carmichael says.

Liffery is built upon many microservices. There are separate front end interfaces for the consumer and business users, and there is also an admin interface for Liffery’s own team.

Liffery uses a number of IONOS services:

- IONOS S3 Object Storage provides cost-effective, scalable storage with highly secure servers and individual access control.
- IONOS Cloud Cubes provide enterprise-grade virtual private servers, with on-demand scalability.
- IONOS Cloud Servers offer live scaling, load balancing and unmetered bandwidth.

“We use all of the inbuilt firewall capabilities,” says Carmichael. “The security is just delivered without us needing to give it much thought.”

Liffery spins up Redis databases within the Cubes and servers and outside of IONOS, it uses MongoDB Atlas, which provides managed MongoDB databases in the cloud.

Costs make a huge difference to a startup, especially in the early stages when a new business model is being tested. “We’re able to spin up a microservice to test functionality, prove it or disprove it with our users, and then kill it very quickly,” says Carmichael. “If we were to do this in one of the hyperscale cloud providers, costs would be astronomically high. Then, you would be more concerned about killing it fast. If you kill something too fast, you haven’t really given the concept a good run for its money, so you don’t truly know if it’s worth running with or not.”

The IONOS offerings are all backed by expert support that is easy to access. “You can’t really pick up the phone and speak to anybody at the hyperscale cloud providers,” says Carmichael. “Whenever anything comes up, I email our IONOS rep and he hooks me up with one of the support people. We usually have a call within half a day. Brilliant!”

Carmichael was able to talk to one of the DevOps network designers. “We had a detailed discussion,” he says. “Actually, we re-engineered some of our app based on the advice that they gave.”

The implementation

Drag-and-drop infrastructure

Crucial to the implementation was the Data Center Designer, which simplifies the process of building a virtual data centre.

“I’m an experienced engineer, but my strength isn’t really in DevOps,” says Carmichael. “The Data Center Designer allowed us to just draw and build networks using their graphical user interface and spin everything up rapidly. We can drag and drop our network together in what feels like 30 seconds.”

“The Data Center Designer is a killer feature,” he says. “What makes it that is the no-code networking it gives you. It is like a visual flowchart designer for infrastructure. It’s very powerful and hugely time-saving in the setup and evolution of the network.”

As well as enabling infrastructure to be built easily, it makes it easier to understand. “It has been an amazing communication tool,” he says. “We’re a tiny team right now (as many startups are), so everyone in our team covers many roles. When one of my developers up in Otley needs to make a change to the network, their change is represented by the visuals of the Data Center Designer. It can be instantly understood by everyone. This has been, and will continue to be, priceless in this new remote working world.”

He adds: “Other platforms do not have this level of illustrative communication and leave a lot to the team to document. Developers don’t enjoy writing documentation and never remember to keep it updated.”

He’s also found the Data Center Designer valuable for provisioning servers with more resources while they are live. On hyperscale cloud platforms he’s used, you have to take an image of the instance, build a new instance with the additional resources based on that image, and then take down the old instance.

“You can improve this by making use of containers, but that is wildly expensive to run and set up,” he says. “And when you just want to run maybe an outreach test with some bespoke function, Kubernetes is a sledgehammer to crack a nut: It is so much more cost-effective to use the resource tweaking feature in the Data Center Designer.”



Conclusion

Freedom to experiment

For startups like Liffery, how fast you can test and evolve is crucial. Using the Data Center Designer, Liffery can rapidly build infrastructure and allocate resources. With IONOS, Liffery can quickly and cost-effectively spin up containers, too. As a result, the company can experiment freely and is not tempted to cancel pilot projects early to save money. When issues arise, Liffery can talk to experts at IONOS directly.

Financial support from IONOS helps Liffery to reduce its costs and risk, too. "The IONOS Startup Program really allowed us to explore and find the weak points in our solution," says Carmichael. "When we got the agreement for the Startup Program, we read it twice because we figured there must be a catch somewhere. There really is no catch."



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