NowCerts migrates its insurance agency system to the cloud

IONOS Cloud gives NowCerts the 24/7 reliability and speed its clients need, supported by knowledgeable customer service.

Featured learnings

- ✓ Moving from dedicated servers to the cloud ensured the NowCerts service remained responsive and available, whatever the customer demand on the system.

- ✓ The cloud enables NowCerts to delight customers with faster onboarding and delivery of new features.

- ✓ Larger companies are reassured by the security, stability, and scalability of IONOS Cloud, which opens up a whole new market for NowCerts.

NowCerts provides cloud-based software that helps insurance agencies run their businesses more effectively and efficiently. Agents use this software to manage their clients and policies, including sales and renewals pipelines. To increase reliability and prepare for future growth, NowCerts migrated its core software to the IONOS Cloud. IONOS offers not only the stability and speed that NowCerts' customers require, but also enables NowCerts to be much more responsive to customer needs.

IONOS

The challenge

Increasing speed and uptime

Peter Germanov, CEO of NowCerts, was running a successful commercial insurance agency but struggling to find a good agency management system. "Nothing worked for us," he said, "so we built our own system. The word got out and other people wanted to use it. That was the lightbulb moment that started NowCerts."

Today, the company's customer base includes 50,000 small, independent insurance agencies in the US, with additional customers in Europe and Australia. The product is licensed on a not-for-profit basis in Africa and the Middle East.

What sets NowCerts apart are its innovation and customer service. "Our competitors are big companies with legacy systems, heavy cost structures, and support that isn't very good," said Germanov. "What our clients really love about us is our excellent support and our forward-thinking philosophy." The support offering includes a team of virtual assistants that can help clients update and manage the data in their NowCerts system.

As an example of the company's innovation, NowCerts was the first truly cloud-based agency management system, and the first to create an open application programming interface (API). The API is free to use and can both read and write to the database. Clients can use the API to integrate with customer relationship management (CRM) systems, ticketing systems, marketing solutions, and Google Sheets. Using the no-code automation tool Zapier, non-programmers can integrate NowCerts with other systems.

Insurance agencies rely on NowCerts for the smooth running of their businesses. The software is vital for day-to-day operations and is increasingly integrated with other systems, so reliability and speed are essential.

From dedicated servers to the cloud

When NowCerts began in 2009, the cloud was still in its infancy. "The hyperscalers were not well developed and were extremely expensive," said Germanov. "We needed to keep our costs down and didn't want to take the security risk of having other companies or databases on the same servers as ours."

That's why NowCerts chose to use IONOS dedicated servers. "They were three or four times cheaper than any of the cloud solutions," said Germanov. NowCerts was using ten servers that all ran copies of the same environment. Whenever something was deployed, it had to be replicated across ten servers.

The business has now outgrown the dedicated server approach. "We always knew that as we grew, the enhanced scalability and flexibility of the cloud would become more important to us," said Germanov. "And we knew that the cloud would eventually bring more and more capabilities such as high availability and enhanced security, and that costs would come down."

Today NowCerts is ready for the cloud, and the cloud is ready for NowCerts.

The solution

Eliminating maintenance downtime with IONOS Cloud

The core Microsoft .NET application and logs are now hosted on IONOS Cloud.

"When you're looking for a technology partner, you need a company that is reliable and financially stable," said Germanov. "It's a fine line because when you go with one of the hyperscalers you get that, but you don't get the customer support. IONOS is big enough that we don't have to worry about what happens if they get acquired or that they won't be able to invest in the infrastructure. But not too big that support suffers."

Indeed, it was IONOS' superior support that set it apart from the competition. "The team at IONOS have immense knowledge of the cloud environment," said Germanov. "We have almost free access to them, which is incredible." As an example of the close collaboration between the two, the IONOS support team worked with NowCerts to resolve latencies in the system.

"We have to be available 24/7," said Germanov. "Our clients have employees all over the world in different time zones, and we are a critical part of their work processes. When we go down, it's not good. It's important that we can pick up the phone and talk to a rep that knows our business, knows the environment, and knows how to help without having to call five layers of people to get permission. To that end, we have established a relationship for addressing critical outages with the IONOS engineering department in Pennsylvania."

The IONOS Data Center Designer provides a drag-and-drop interface that the NowCerts team can use to configure their own virtual data centers in minutes. "The graphic interface of building and managing a data center in the IONOS Cloud is really cool and better than what's available with the competition. Our DevOps lead says the Data Center Designer made it so easy for him to experiment with different configurations."

Moving to the IONOS Cloud gave NowCerts the ability to automatically deploy more resources when they are required to meet demand, speeding up response times. By building a high availability system based on mirroring, NowCerts has eliminated the weekly periods of downtime previously required for full updates. NowCerts can now deploy updates seamlessly at any time without closing the service.

The implemenatation

Adopting a cloud-native architecture

As NowCerts' client base grew, it started to attract larger businesses that require the greater reliability, security, and flexibility that today's cloud offers. NowCerts was already running workloads in AWS and Azure, but had a good relationship with IONOS and was keen to explore the IONOS Cloud offering. IONOS worked with NowCerts to offer support throughout the cloud migration.

"Four years ago, we started re-engineering our software to take advantage of modern cloud environments, based on microservices," said Germanov. "There were some things we had built into the original system that were hard to get rid of, to do with where we store files and the database connections. But after several years, we were at a point where we could start putting the system into a true cloud-based environment."

Using a genuine cloud-native architecture meant that NowCerts no longer needed to update ten servers. The updates are deployed once and scale across the servers automatically.

The migration process included production tests and stress testing. A load balancer was used to manage the subdomains on the IONOS Cloud and, after that was fully tested, the application was migrated to the IONOS Cloud.

Conclusion

Accelerating innovation in the cloud

The cloud environment is enabling NowCerts to be extremely responsive to customer requirements. "A lot of our clients request new functionality," said Germanov. "Because the cloud environment enables us to deploy without having to stop the servers, we can make updates in a day. That blows people's minds. It's almost unheard of with our competition."

The cloud has also accelerated NowCerts' onboarding process. It's hard for customers to switch from competitor solutions, so NowCerts has hired a data team to help automate the data migration. From some rival solutions, NowCerts can import data in a day. "The dynamic nature of the cloud enables us to add data to our existing databases very quickly, without having to stop and start," said Germanov. "It will help us to further improve our onboarding process, especially for agencies switching from other vendors, which is a huge opportunity for us."

There will be growth in the customer base, too. "The move to the cloud will enable us to reach some of the bigger agencies," said Germanov. "Previously, they were reluctant to come to us because of concerns about security and reliability. Now that we are on IONOS Cloud, those concerns will go away."

About IONOS

With over 8.5 million customer contracts, IONOS is a leading global provider of cloud infrastructure, cloud services, and hosting services.

Our product portfolio includes Compute Engine, an IaaS compute engine with its own virtualised code stack; Managed Kubernetes for container applications; a private cloud powered by VMware; and S3 object storage. Our solutions provide established medium-sized and large companies, regulated industries, the digital economy and the public sector with all the services they need to be successful in and with the cloud.

We are convinced that data sovereignty is essential for successful digitalisation. That's why we are committed to ensuring that our customers retain control over their data and applications.

Treating our customers fairly is very important to us, so we offer transparent pricing and by-the-minute billing, no vendor lock-ins and the best price/performance ratio in the IaaS market. Ease of use is another priority, so we provide highly flexible solutions and easy, drag and drop configuration through our patented Data Center Designer and APIs.

We also attach great importance to customer needs. Dedicated account management, tailored cloud architecture consulting – including support with proof of concept by professional services – and free 24/7 enterprise-level support with certified system administrators are available to help users in any situation.

Our history

For over 30 years, IONOS has been developing innovative, reliable and high-quality solutions that help companies of all sizes to digitalise their business processes.

These include web hosting products and office applications, proprietary data centres and innovative cloud solutions. In addition, we have continuously enhanced our portfolio through strategic acquisitions.

Since its foundation in 1988, IONOS (formerly 1&1) has become Europe's largest hosting provider. In 2010, Achim Weiss, the current CEO of IONOS, founded an IaaS provider, which is now the basis for IONOS Cloud. With 8 million customer contracts and georedundant data centres in Germany, Europe and the USA, we provide intelligently coordinated products for every phase of a company's development.

IONOS Cloud is a sub-brand of IONOS, a United Internet AG company.

More information is available at cloud.ionos.co.uk.

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