



Stonebridge IT transitions customers to remote working, while cutting server maintenance times from hours to minutes

By migrating its clients to the cloud, Stonebridge enabled them to keep working when Covid struck, and simplified maintenance.

Featured learnings:

- The IONOS Cloud Data Center Designer enables quick configuration and deployment of virtual data centres, using an intuitive, drag-and-drop interface.
- Because Stonebridge can quickly spin up demonstration environments, it's easier to impress new clients and win business.
- Migrating from on-premises servers to the cloud makes maintenance much easier – redundancy is built in, and Stonebridge can remotely access the cloud servers at any time.



Stonebridge IT provides fully managed IT solutions for small and medium-sized businesses in the US. By migrating its customers' servers to the cloud, Stonebridge enabled them to keep working when the pandemic shut down offices. Maintenance that used to take two hours now takes just 15 minutes. And by using the IONOS Data Center Designer, Stonebridge can quickly build and deploy a virtual data centre. "It's our secret weapon," said the company's CEO.

The challenge

Work from anywhere in times of crisis



Alen Zilic
CEO & Founder of Stonebridge IT

Using the cloud, even small and medium businesses can achieve resilience in uncertain times. That was something Alen Zilic, CEO and founder of Stonebridge IT, had been telling his clients for years. But it took the Covid-19 pandemic for many of them to see just how right he was.

Stonebridge IT is a consultancy that helps businesses with more than 20 employees to manage their IT. Companies with no or limited in-house IT expertise turn to Stonebridge for support on networking, cybersecurity, backup, and more. Stonebridge provides fully managed solutions.

“We had previously set up remote access for our customers using their own hardware,” said Zilic. “It was always treated as a luxury, a special case, because resources were limited to whatever customers had on site. If they had a server, we might be able to handle four or five VIPs remoting in to get a few things done. Often, their culture wouldn’t allow employees to work from home.”

“We would say: ‘Look, you’re going to spend X amount of money replacing the hardware and X amount of labour to migrate. But you’ll end up with the same dependency on your office, your suite, your power and internet. Instead, you could put this effort towards moving a server to the cloud.’” He added, “For the price of the monthly subscription, you even stop any concerns about maintaining the system in house. You don’t need to worry about air conditioning and power redundancy, battery backup, and multiple internet connections to make sure it’s accessible.”

Stonebridge’s customers are mostly based in the state of South Carolina, and Los Angeles and Orange County in Southern California. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, California was severely affected. “The regulations were a

little stricter than the rest of the country,” said Zilic. “A lot of businesses became more fluid with work-from-home, work-from-anywhere policies. They just had to get it done. We saw an increase in desire for companies to move into the cloud.”

The solution

IONOS enables 24/7 cloud access

“When companies didn’t need to be in the office anymore, it made sense to migrate to custom-made cloud servers that are private and portable,” said Zilic. “We moved clients into a hybrid world where they would heavily leverage Microsoft Office 365 for their collaboration, communication, and storage. For those that needed servers or special applications, we built servers they could remote into from anywhere. If the application works today, we can make it work tomorrow in the cloud.”

He added: “Moving to the cloud gave a lot of our clients the flexibility to sublet their offices or do something else without paying the high rents downtown. They reinvested the savings in technology.”

Stonebridge used the IONOS Cloud infrastructure as a service (IaaS) platform. “The platform almost immediately enabled us to stay nimble, deploy things quickly and easily, and give our clients the private servers they were asking for,” said Zilic.

Accountants, financial organisations, and manufacturers were among the customers that trusted Stonebridge to get their business-critical applications up and running in the cloud. Applications moved include QuickBooks, line-of-business applications, and inventory software. “We essentially plucked their server from in-house, cloned it, and created a custom design using remote desktop servers in the cloud.”

The solution synchronises between the cloud server and Microsoft SharePoint and OneDrive, so that even when customers aren’t using the IONOS server, they can access their core files through standard Microsoft applications.

Stonebridge manages the server, including adding advanced cybersecurity protection, web filtering, a next generation firewall, disaster recovery and backup.

The solutions used are from Stonebridge's preferred vendors and integrate well with the IONOS platform. "We back up our clients' data every four hours to a remote third-party provider," said Zilic. "We can recover a whole server within half an hour without ever dispatching an engineer to the customer's site. That's huge for any business."

"We don't use any unique technology when we're building these servers," he adds. "They're still Microsoft-based servers, so there is portability if customers decide to revert, upgrade or move to another platform. We never lock any of our customers in with proprietary solutions."

The implementation

Data Center Designer accelerates deployments

Stonebridge has been working with IONOS for over 6 years. "IONOS had a data centre in Las Vegas that was of particular interest to us, because we're familiar with the switch facility there," said Zilic. "We figured if it's secure enough for the police, major telecommunications providers, and hospitals, then it's secure enough for our clients. It helped to reassure clients because there's always a concern about where data is actually stored when it is in the cloud. This particular location is certified for SSAE-18, SOC 3, SOC 2, SOC 1, NIST 800-53, FedRAMP, FISMA, PCI-DSS, HIPAA, ISO 27001, SSAE-16 Type 1."

IONOS also has a data centre in New Jersey, which is of interest as Stonebridge expanded to South Carolina, Greenville, on the East Coast a year ago.

Stonebridge does some work using one of the major hyperscalers, too. "The big guys' platforms are a little intimidating," said Zilic. "The billing is all over the place with them. It's hard to predict. The IONOS platform gives us more predictability when it comes to the cost for us and for our clients."

IONOS was also much easier to use, compared to the hyperscalers, which can have an overwhelming array of features and options. "How can I compare IONOS to hyperscalers?" said Zilic. "It's wonderful to walk into a hardware store and see so many supplies, materials and tools. But, if we're hanging up a picture, we just need a hammer and a nail. Using IONOS, it was a lot

easier and quicker to get to the point where we were comfortable managing it than it was with the hyperscaler. The hyperscalers of Microsoft, Amazon or Google are so much more complicated for the power that we get back in return. They would be highly underutilised by most of our clients."

The IONOS Data Center Designer (DCD) provides a drag-and-drop interface to build a virtual data centre. "It's absolutely beautiful," said Zilic. "It bridges the Type 1 hypervisor gap for us. With Microsoft Hyper-V or VMware, there's hardware planning and build out before you get to do what you are doing with IONOS right away. With Type 1 hypervisors, you must build the infrastructure before you can even spin up virtual machines. With IONOS, the hypervisor is built for us, which is a huge time saver. And then it's simply: click and drag, deploy."

He added: "I have not seen this done on any other platform. It's unique."

"Our secret weapon now is how easily we can deploy these servers using the DCD," said Zilic. "When most people start shopping for cloud services, they get overwhelmed. Within 15 minutes we can show them a functioning demo. We've also built data centres that are on standby, which we can turn on to demonstrate to the client. It's nice to have that inexpensive tool in our back pocket. We look like magicians. Clients say, 'Wow, that's our old server! It's in the cloud, just like that!'"



IONOS Data Center Designer (DCD)

Because it's so simple, Stonebridge's junior engineers can deploy servers. "We save on labour costs to get the work done, and save further because there is very little training time required, too," said Zilic.

Customers are delighted with the higher service levels they can enjoy in the cloud compared to keeping their infrastructure on site. It used to take at least two hours to perform routine maintenance tasks using the old model, but now they can be completed in 15 minutes. “The maintenance windows have shortened so much,” said Zilic. “Rebooting servers, upgrading memory, and adding storage are all just clicks away.”

He added: “Clients used to have to schedule off the clock when we could access the building to do maintenance. Now, we can remote in at any time, after hours. Our clients are not even aware it’s happening. Just 15 minutes of work and they have a new operating system, the latest security patches, or more storage. Life just keeps going, and they’re not even aware of any impact of the maintenance done in the background.”

On the occasions where Stonebridge has needed support, IONOS has been there for them. “They were very responsive,” said Zilic. “We got our answers the same day we opened tickets. We haven’t had any outages that were not self-induced, and when we couldn’t fix it ourselves, somebody at IONOS fixed it for us quickly.”

Conclusion

Business as usual, always

Stonebridge has enabled its customers to be more resilient and flexible, by migrating their critical business applications to the cloud. “We’ve had customers who gave up their office when the pandemic struck, regardless of how nice the office was,” said Zilic. “And they said: ‘This is great! I can work from anywhere and get things done!’”

As well as giving Stonebridge the ability to deploy private servers quickly, IONOS also offers more predictable costs than the hyperscalers. The IONOS DCD enables Stonebridge to visually design and deploy data centre configurations. Some clients and partners find not only the speed, but also the interface an attractive proposition. “Depending on how geeky they are, when we do a demo, some people will lean over and say, ‘What is that? That is so cool!’ And these are highly certified engineers already managing huge solutions with other hosts. They’re always giddy about the solution and how easy it is to use, which really piques their interest.”

The next time there is a disruptive event, whether it affects the whole world like Covid did, or just the community where a company is based, Stonebridge’s customers will be better prepared. For them, it will be business as usual, thanks to Stonebridge and IONOS.

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