

Insurance provider's sophisticated analysis powered by cloud technology helps clients weather storms

An insurance pioneer with unique, tailored programs for clients in disaster-prone areas, St James Insurance Group also leads the way in cloud-based IT infrastructure. Initially deploying disaster recovery in the cloud to protect its own business, this innovative company is further minimizing costs and creating business agility by expanding its use of cloud to resource-heavy, production applications.

profile

Privately owned and managed, St James Insurance Group is a pioneer in the insurance space. Instead of distancing itself from disaster prone areas, this forward-looking company has differentiated itself by creating insurance programs targeted at regions where weather-related catastrophes are common. The programs are nationally recognized and placed with only the highest quality insurance carriers. With a focus on integrity and quality, St James provides a range of services for its carrier partners and agents, including policy processing, underwriting, claims adjudication and marketing. It customizes its offerings to meet the diverse and specific needs of clients.

Key to providing such a successful and progressive business environment is the IT infrastructure that forms the backbone of St James' business. Tom Lehr, senior IT manager at St James, is tasked with providing an infrastructure that enables the company to strategically and competitively position itself for growth. He does that by utilizing cloud technology.

finding the cloud that fits

St James' journey to the cloud began a few years ago. Lehr determined it would be inefficient to try to protect the company's growing data and systems by replicating to equipment he would need to purchase. His vision was to replicate to equipment that he could rent at a monthly cost and have someone else do the replication for him. What he did not foresee was the difficulty in finding a provider that shared his vision.



profile

- ▶ SIZE: SMB
- ▶ INDUSTRY: Financial
- ▶ TYPE: Insurance
- ▶ APPLICATION: Production & DRaaS
- ▶ HEAD OFFICE: Florida, USA

challenges

- ▶ Skyrocketing IT costs
- ▶ Protection of data and systems
- ▶ The ability to scale easily as needed

benefits

- ▶ Near-zero recovery time
- ▶ Easily scalable as the company grows
- ▶ Cost-effective
- ▶ Peace of mind

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*Tom Lehr
senior IT manager*

He comments, “I couldn’t find anyone, anywhere that could help, and believe me, I looked hard. Vendors simply weren’t getting it - I do not want to buy a brand new Mercedes and park it in your garage and never use it. I want you to buy the Mercedes and dangle the keys on a pegboard somewhere so that I can maybe, every once in a while, come by and drive it for a fee - but you’re buying it.”

Lehr’s research took him all over the internet as he looked at numerous providers in his mission to find the right fit. But he didn’t find a match until one of his peers suggested iland. He remembers saying to himself at the time, “This is it. This is what I’ve been looking for - exactly soup to nuts.”

Lehr deployed iland’s Disaster-Recovery-as-a-Service to protect St James’ data and systems. The disaster recovery (DR) plan includes failing over to iland’s Los Angeles data center, well away from the company’s home-base in Florida. Annual testing of the DR plan ensures Lehr’s confidence that it will work during a real disaster.

That was then. Fast forward a few years and Lehr had a new project on the horizon that required a significant decision. He needed to run a forecast modeling system. This application looks at weather events - such as Hurricane Andrew that occurred in the early ‘90s – as well as the costs of those events and the years since they occurred. The probability of that type of hurricane hitting again is based on all the other hurricanes that have occurred since then, along with current weather patterns. The forecast system models all that criteria together to come up with the risk of such an event happening again.

Lehr states, “Running a system like that takes a whole lot of horsepower and we were due for a complete equipment overhaul. The vendor that supplies the system had developed a new version that revolves around virtualization. So I was left with a choice. I either spend a certain amount on physical equipment, or I go virtual for around double that amount, or I take it to iland and pay a small fraction of that per month. I chose iland. I got exactly what I wanted.”

reaping the benefits

Lehr enjoys the flexibility of iland’s reservation plus burst capacity pricing model for the new application. It allows him to pay a lower monthly rate for the compute resources he knows he needs, yet burst to extra capacity when required.

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Having worked closely with iland to develop his DR solution, Lehr was reluctant to even talk to other providers when the new project came up. He says, “I wouldn’t even consider it. The idea of going through another vendor for something I knew iland could do made no sense to me. I already have such a great relationship with them. Why would I shop around for something like that? Besides, I know a lot of people in the industry and I know what the costs are. iland is definitely below it, but well above it as far as standards and value are concerned.”

Lehr is delighted with the service received from iland during his four years as a customer. He comments, “With many other vendors I would simply be a number lost in the shuffle somewhere. I never feel that way with iland - ever. I feel that I’m important to them and I like that because if the chips are down you need somebody there.”

what about the future?

St James’ insurance business is growing. Lehr’s decision to move more of its IT to the cloud is key to the company’s strategic growth objectives. Not only are costs kept to a minimum, the IT department is able to focus on strategic initiatives and core business instead of the distractions and headaches inherent in the procurement and maintenance of hardware.

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about iland

With data centers in the U.S. and U.K., iland delivers proven enterprise cloud solutions that help companies do business faster, smarter and more flexibly. Unlike any other provider, iland’s technology and consultative approach mean anyone—regardless of expertise, location or business objective—can experience the benefits of a hassle-free cloud.

From scaling production workloads, to supporting testing and development, to disaster recovery, iland’s secure cloud and decades of experience translate into unmatched service. Underscoring the strength of its platform, the company has been recognized as VMware’s Service Provider Partner of the Year, Global and Americas.

iland partners with the following to tailor comprehensive disaster recovery solutions for customers: Zerto, Veeam, VMware SRM, Vision Solutions.

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