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IT transformation drives business value through data innovation

Insurance Australia Group has made the Dell EMC PowerFlex platform the key to its strategy, positioning data as a front-office, real-time asset for the business and its customers.

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Burak Hoban
Principal Platform Architect,
IAG

Business needs

Dealing with a slower legacy infrastructure, IAG needed to better use data to enhance its operations and customer service. To transform the organization from a back-office, batch-oriented design to a more dynamic approach, IAG chose the agile, scalable, high-performance Dell EMC PowerFlex software-defined platform.

Business results

- Transformed itself to use data in critical front-office applications.

- Frees IT staff from routine tasks so they can deliver more business value.

- 30–50% data center space and cost savings.

- Consolidated 15 data warehouses down to 1.

Solutions at a glance

- Dell EMC PowerFlex
- Dell EMC PowerEdge
- Dell EMC PowerSwitch

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Insurance Australia Group (IAG) is the largest general insurance company in Australia and New Zealand. The group offers personal and commercial insurance across a variety of leading brands. With products designed to deliver peace of mind, everything the firm does revolves around the customer.

Slowed by a legacy IT infrastructure, IAG wanted to move data from what were largely back-office functions to drive dynamic, real-time, customer-facing systems. To maintain its edge and extend its leadership in serving customers, IAG chose the Dell EMC PowerFlex software-defined platform.

"We needed a platform that was performant, could scale quickly and had very little management overhead," says Burak Hoban, principal platform architect at IAG. "That's precisely what PowerFlex gives us."

Meeting transformation goals

IAG has made numerous acquisitions in recent years, requiring consolidation of approximately 15 data warehouses. Legacy hardware presented a stumbling block.

"We needed to transform the way we work," Hoban states. "In our business, speed and agility are essential. The infrastructure we're building had to be stable, but also easily changed and maneuvered. Having run PowerFlex for a number of years, we definitely made the right choice."

The PowerFlex software-defined platform provides transformational agility, with extreme flexibility and massive scalability in addition to enterprise-class performance and resilience.

"Whilst we originally deployed PowerFlex for both our data and analytical workloads, the transformation from traditional batch-based workloads to real-time streaming and API-driven customer-facing workloads has made PowerFlex mission critical to various systems across the organization," explains Hoban.

Centralizing operations and delivering more value

IAG uses Rancher as its Kubernetes solution to manage its containerized applications, which are deployed on Red Hat OpenStack clusters. Both platforms rely on PowerFlex for storage and compute resources. The PowerFlex infrastructure also utilizes Dell EMC networking switches and incorporates Dell EMC PowerEdge servers as part of the stack.

100% uptime over the past 3 years.

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OpenStack runs IAG's VMs, supporting a wide array of critical workloads — ranging from databases to application services. Kubernetes hosts many of IAG's more modern, API-driven containerized workloads. Red Hat Enterprise Linux is also a vital part of the company's technology ecosystem, as is Red Hat Satellite, which is used for package and subscription management.

"Some of the workloads on PowerFlex involve databases — structured and unstructured, single node or distributed," Hoban remarks. "These include analytic work benches and Spark batch jobs, which might be used for predictions or batch scoring. We also run acquisition processes, real-time streaming, APIs and UIs. Literally anything you can think of, we're actually now running on top of PowerFlex."

A key for IAG is how PowerFlex reduces the time and effort needed to maintain and manage the platform. "The resilience of PowerFlex means that we don't need any full-time employees to babysit our storage platform," notes Hoban. "This lets us move on to higher-order work that provides more value to our organization, as well as to our customers."

Reducing data center costs

PowerFlex has not only enabled IAG's IT team to contribute more to the organization's transformation and deliver on the very tight timelines that are often required, but it has also reduced floor space requirements and costs in the company's data centers.

"Ultimately, from both a rack space and cost perspective, PowerFlex has probably saved us 30 to 50%," Hoban comments. "We plan on building more clusters and expanding our footprint. We've been so impressed with the performance and scalability of PowerFlex that we wouldn't consider any other infrastructure platform."

He concludes, "Dell Technologies has been so supportive and flexible. We've had so much success together over the past few years, and we'd love to see that relationship continue."

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