

Case Study

Transforming Netplans with Self-service and Automation

Introduction

Founded in 1998, NetPlans is a leading IT Systems House in Germany. A complete range of IT services are delivered by 300 staff from 14 locations across Germany and Switzerland.

As the company has grown, NetPlans have transitioned many customers from on-premises servers to a range of cloud solutions.

Who

We sat down with Daniel Schweikle, head of Business Cloud Solutions, and Felix Stadthaus, Engineering Team Lead to understand their Business Cloud offerings and the part Atria has played in their ongoing success.

Netplans Cloud Ready Check steers customers to the right Cloud Solution

NetPlans Business Cloud – a complete IT solution delivered from NetPlans datacentres, optionally with Microsoft 365 services

German Cloud – Infrastructure services delivered from NetPlans cloud platform

Euro Cloud – infrastructure solutions delivered via IONOS

Public Cloud – solutions built on Microsoft Azure

CHALLENGES



The Problem – An Ever-Increasing Demand for IT Skills

For mid-market customers, NetPlans saw inefficiencies in how IT services were being delivered. Supporting many instances of infrastructure ultimately required a lot of skilled engineering resources. With many technologies in use, this meant Infrastructure (VMware, networking) skills, Windows Server skills and Citrix skills, sitting alongside customer specific systems and knowledge.

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As Daniel pointed out “the costs associated with providing IT services for a 10-user business or a 200-user business require similar effort, but smaller businesses are unable to justify the expense to do this properly.” Equally, without automation, the same human maintenance tasks are performed multiple times across multiple customers – meaning growth can only come with associated growth of engineering staff.

Aside from the workload and variation growing with each new customer, errors and rework become costly to manage. Regardless of expertise, every engineer can make mistakes; place objects in the wrong place, mis-spell names, incorrectly implement naming conventions, or even inadvertently delete data. Human error and associated inconsistencies have proven to cause significant and costly problems over time. Eroding customer trust and preventing scale.

THE SOLUTION



Over 10 years ago, Daniel started looking for a better way to deliver IT to their mid-market customers. Atria turned out to be the missing piece of the puzzle that would enable them to completely change their operations.

NetPlans started with Citrix CloudPortal Services Manager in 2012 and have since upgraded to Atria. The original deployment used the Citrix Reference Architecture for delivering Hosted Apps and Desktops at scale using Atria and Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops.

The platform today supports hundreds of customers operating across multiple Active Directory instances and Azure AD. Furthermore, the reseller features within Atria have been combined with NetPlans’ infrastructure services to cleverly support the unique needs of ISVs.

NetPlans found a common problem, Many Independent Software Vendors (ISVs) had demand to host their applications for customers but were struggling with the different skillset needed. The net result: unreliable service, security issues and customer dissatisfaction. Fundamentally though, Application hosting was outside their area of expertise.

"The onboarding of new service desk staff is now much faster – service desk staff can be immediately productive."

– Netplans

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NetPlans enabled ISVs to go back to focusing on their core business while being able to offer a more secure and reliable application hosting experience to their customers. NetPlans used Atria's native ability to manage multiple Active Directories as well as Atria's ability to securely multi-tenant a single Active Directory.

"We do not know
how we could
have coped with
our growth
without Atria"

Daniel Schweikle,
*Head of Business
Cloud Solutions*
- **Netplans**

An instance of Private infrastructure is isolated for the ISV and managed by Atria. Using Atria Service Automation, the ISV is able to scale to 100s of tenants without manual IT process. The private infrastructure allows the ISV to care for their own applications, while white labelling of the Atria portal means that they can bring their own brand to their customers.

Atria automates the process of creating new customers and users for the ISV; once setup, the customers are able to manage their own users. The majority of IT tasks have been eliminated and the ISV helpdesk is able to perform most changes without requiring administrative skills (or administrative access). Behind the scenes, NetPlans manage backups, security, patching and the Citrix desktop infrastructure. Daniel reiterates the benefits: "One ISV is managing over 300 tenants through Atria, their customers are able to self-manage, up time is improved and the stress and pains of looking after infrastructure has gone."

BENEFITS



1

Consistency

With everything being done the same way, the possibility of mistakes is eliminated

Atria allows NetPlans to manage hundreds of customers through one Portal, with the ability to share Active Directories being instrumental in delivering virtual desktops efficiently at scale.

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2

Productivity

The onboarding of new service desk staff is now much faster – service desk staff can be immediately productive.

While every customer is unique, a quick and common onboarding process gives a great start to a new customer relationship

3

Cost-Efficiency

Atria's licensing was a big help for NetPlans' business case as it allowed them to start small and grow without the heavy upfront costs

In 10 years of operation, the Business Cloud has steadily grown to become a substantial part of the NetPlans business – despite this growth, there has not been dramatic growth in staff numbers

4

Real Results

New Customers can be setup with empty desktops, core applications, with all users and desktops provisioned and ready to use in under 2 hours.

The onboarding of bespoke applications and infrastructure, cutover and training is typically handled in 1 – 3 working weeks

Customers can self-onboard new employees with full access to everything they need in less than 2 minutes, without needing assistance from NetPlans. ISVs gain the benefits of the entire NetPlans Business Cloud platform, with the ability to manage their own customers and users – they become a virtual cloud provider without needing to ever worry about infrastructure or desktop virtualisation.

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SCALING EFFICIENTLY



2 engineers maintain the entire platform of 900 virtual machines across 2 datacentres delivering over 2500 users with virtual desktops.

3 full-time staff continuously on-board new customers onto NetPlans Business Cloud.

Support cases are handled alongside on-premises and private/infrastructure customers by the NetPlans shared service desk.

Thanks to the high levels of automation, NetPlans typically sees just 20-30 support cases per month for this entire platform.

Technology Platform:

- Atria
- Windows Server 2016/2019
- Microsoft 365 (Direct CSP Partner)
- Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops

"We don't need to know how the customer is setup, where they are located, no need to look up documentation, find passwords, log onto servers – Atria really delivers a huge time saving"

Daniel Schweikle,
Head of Business Cloud Solutions
– **Netplans**