

Systems Integrator Advances Strategy by Unifying Converged Infrastructure Management



Data#3 uses unified converged infrastructure management to support growth and innovation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: Data#3

Industry: Business Technology Solutions

Location: Headquartered in Brisbane with offices across Australia

Number of Employees: 900

Challenge

- Increase efficiency by improving management of converged infrastructure environment
- Provide cost-effective managed services, including on-premise, cloud, and hybrid offerings
- Increase workload volume without increasing administrative overhead

Solution

- Cisco UCS
- Cisco UCS Director
- Cisco Nexus

Results

- Quadrupled managed services workloads without additions to administration team
- Reduced time required to provision VLANs in multitenant environment from weeks to seconds
- Lets customers provision own servers in minutes through self-service portal

Challenge

Data#3 Limited has been anticipating customer technology needs successfully for more than 30 years, as evidenced by the fact that the company is now one of the leading systems integrators in Australia. Data#3 uses a technology consumption model to analyze customer trends and then maps its solutions to meet customer needs.

One of the strong emerging trends in recent years has been customer interest in reducing capital expenses by taking advantage of cloud-based services for at least some infrastructure requirements. In response, Data#3 formalized its managed services solutions business three years ago. In that time, the company has successfully grown this part of the business, including revenue from on-premise and cloud-based offerings.

As a public company, Data#3 is always aware of delivering value to shareholders, and the managed solutions business offers an attractive recurring revenue model. “Our goal is to achieve a balance of delivering managed solutions to customers and also supporting the on-premise infrastructure solutions when applicable. We believe that, for the foreseeable future, customers will want a mix of the two, demanding excellence in both from Data#3,” says John Griffin, cloud solutions manager for Data#3’s Managed Solutions business.

The Data#3 Managed Solutions 250-person team delivers design, implementation, and management services for customer infrastructures based on the Cisco® Unified Computing System™ (UCS®) and FlexPod data center platform.

The company has two data centers in Sydney and Brisbane. The data centers are based on the FlexPod data center platform, which delivers pre-validated, standardized, scalable building blocks for next-generation data centers. FlexPod accelerates infrastructure deployment for the Managed Solutions group, while also reducing risk and cost.

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John Griffin

Cloud Solutions Manager –
Managed Solutions, Data#3 Limited

In addition to FlexPod’s scalable infrastructure, both automated orchestration and management are vital companions. “As a managed services provider, our competitiveness depends on being able to quickly provision services for customers,” says Griffin. “As business grew, we realized that there was too much manual work involved in service delivery, and we needed to find a way to greatly increase workloads without increasing staff.”

The team began evaluating vendor-neutral infrastructure automation platforms for private, public, and hybrid clouds. After extensive evaluation, the team settled on the Cloupia Unified Infrastructure Controller. Griffin says, “The Cloupia platform was clearly the best-of-breed solution. Out of the box, it gave us about 80 percent of the functionality we were after, which meant that we could get to market with new services even faster than we had anticipated. We could also handle a much higher volume of workloads with significantly lower operational costs.”

While Cloupia met all of Data#3’s criteria for a cloud and hybrid infrastructure automation solution, one problem arose: Data#3 prefers to use products delivered by its strategic partners. “You can imagine how pleased we were when we found out that Cloupia was being acquired by Cisco. With UCS Director, as the platform is now known, we had a best-of-breed platform that met our business needs, as well as our requirements for support from a strategic partner,” says Griffin.

Solution

Cisco UCS Director unifies management, automation, and orchestration across a converged infrastructure of computing, networking, and storage components. It supports the industry’s leading converged infrastructure solutions, including FlexPod and FlexPod Express, EMC VSPEX, and Virtual Computing Environment (VCE) Vblock Systems, based on the Cisco UCS and Cisco Nexus® platforms.

Cisco UCS Director and FlexPod offer the Data#3 Managed Solutions team the ability to manage multitenant environments more easily and with greater security. Virtualized and nonvirtualized workloads can be isolated, yet run side-by-side; the workloads and their associated resources remain independent of each other.

“The blended environment of private, public, and hybrid clouds is going to be a reality for a long time, and we wanted an automation solution that gave us the ability to manage this blended world as a single, unified environment,” says Griffin. “Cisco UCS Director gives us that critical visibility, a single pane of glass, for management, automation, and orchestration across all layers of the stack and all cloud and hybrid environments.”

With the product’s intuitive nature and out-of-the-box functionality, Data#3 solution architect Craig McDonald says it took less than three hours to set up UCS Director.

Cisco UCS Director provides a built-in task library and an easy-to-use workflow user-interface designer, which IT administrators can use to design complex workflows visually. Engineers can build and run repeatable physical and virtual infrastructure provisioning workflows without complex custom scripts. These capabilities make it easy to customize and automate important operational tasks.

“This has helped us solve one of our biggest problems,” says McDonald, “which is backend provisioning for new tenants, connecting all of the necessary storage, computer, and network components. With Cisco UCS Director’s native management of Cisco UCS, Nexus fabric, NetApp, and EMC storage, we can use the orchestrator capability within Cisco UCS Director to create an automated workflow and then simply execute it. We do not have to recreate every process every time.”

In addition to efficient automation, Cisco UCS Director creates consistency. “The concern I always have is that when you have a lot of engineers who are too hands-on building virtualized environments on such a big cloud platform, you can quickly lose control,” says Griffin. “Consistency is extremely important. Cisco UCS Director uses a model-based orchestration capability that enables us to build repeatable provisioning workflows and templates without scripting. This eliminates the variability associated with different people writing scripts in their own way.”

Cisco UCS Director’s self-service catalog allows the Managed Solutions team to create standardized workflows according to inhouse policies and procedures. Customers can request new services from this catalog with Data#3’s governance already included. “We are able to create the appropriate policies and rules around what they can and cannot provision, so we can protect our backend infrastructure, while still giving customers enough functionality to service their own needs,” says McDonald.

“When we were evaluating other automation platforms, one of the many things that distinguished Cisco’s solution from everyone else’s is the fact that customers can see both their virtual and physical workloads,” says Griffin. “When we host a dedicated blade for a customer, it shows up in the customer’s dashboard view as well. Competitive products could not manage the physical side of the infrastructure for a tenant.”

Results

Data#3 went into production with Cisco UCS Director in January. They quickly discovered that it reduced server provisioning time to minutes. “We are very focused on educating customers on the importance of a service catalog and setting expectations for their businesses,” says Griffin. “Through Data#3’s Business Productivity Services team, we will help customers put together service catalogs and help them automate that catalog through a portal. Over time, the catalog can be used to provision a full range of business technologies for end users, from mobile phones to new applications to user rights and so on.”

“The ability to automate across multiple stacks is pretty visionary compared to what was out there,” says McDonald. “We see Cisco UCS Director playing an important role in enabling our customers to experiment with taking different workloads into different clouds and assisting them in maintaining control of their infrastructures.”

The Managed Solutions team has access to a library of more than 400 built-in tasks and out-of-the-box workflows, including Day 1 through Day 3 maintenance and update activities. “Cisco UCS Director’s model-based orchestration and templating allow us to automate and execute administrative and operation tasks in a matter of minutes,” says McDonald. “The time savings is tremendous.”

For example, creating VLANs used to take weeks because of all the manual steps involved in defining the business process, peer review, and provisioning. Now it is a preapproved change that can be executed almost instantly.

“We have been able to quadruple the number of workloads that are under management with zero increase to the administration team,” says Griffin. “That speaks to the dramatic productivity gains we have realized with this platform.”

Next Steps

The UCS Director deployment is paving the way for the company to deliver more software-based solutions to the market. As Griffin says, “We also see the need to transform our operations, and the development of our solutions to have a stronger focus around software. Recently, we started putting software integration engineering into our team to leverage the APIs and the SDK that come with the UCS Director product to facilitate better integration with the IT service management (ITSM) toolset, with viewing engines that are for that purpose. Within ITSM, we get our change management and configuration management, etc., but we see it as being a central point to information serving a whole bunch of other applications that are necessary to deliver on the promise of hybrid cloud.”

Data#3 is enthusiastic about expanding into new market opportunities, and the company believes that UCS Director plays an important role in supporting its vision of delivering innovative new services to customers.

For More Information

For more information about Cisco UCS Director, visit www.cisco.com/go/ucsdirector.

Product List

Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS)

Cisco UCS Director

Cisco Nexus switches



Americas Headquarters
Cisco Systems, Inc.
San Jose, CA

Asia Pacific Headquarters
Cisco Systems (USA) Pte. Ltd.
Singapore

Europe Headquarters
Cisco Systems International BV Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

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