



Business challenge

In the competitive managed IT services market, differentiation is key. Sigmax wanted to provide more personalized services to customers, but its existing infrastructure was not sufficiently flexible.

Transformation

Sigmax deployed VersaStack from Cisco and IBM, building on the innate flexibility of the solution to deliver a new range of cloud services that can be precisely tailored to individual customer needs.



Business benefits:

Meets

untapped customer demand for customization to help Sigmax grow its market share

Up to 30%

storage performance increases reported, enhancing service quality

Drives

operational efficiency through simpler management and higher resource utilization

Sigmax Embracing a truly customer-centric approach through flexible, tailored cloud services

Located in Enschede in the Netherlands, Sigmax is an IT solutions provider with five business units. Four are focused on software development, including the creation of mobile solutions aimed at local authorities, police authorities and field services, while the fifth delivers managed services.

“With VersaStack, we can provide services that meet a huge range of customer needs, giving both us and them an advantage over the competition.”

Robbie Mulders

Commercial Manager

Sigmax



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Finding a USP

Companies choose managed IT services to take the time, effort and expertise out of equipping their employees with the latest technology—and they expect providers to stay abreast of innovations on their behalf. With so many new and disruptive competitors entering the market, the pressure is on providers to find a unique selling point and capitalize on it.

Robbie Mulders, Commercial Manager at Sigmax, says: “We recognized that something was missing from our cloud solutions portfolio; we just weren’t sure what it was. It was vital that we developed a more unique cloud offering, and fast.”

Discussing its challenges with long-term partners Cisco and Comstor, Sigmax realized that offering more customized, flexible solutions to customers could be the answer.

Robbie Mulders says: “Our partners helped us see the light: it was time for us to take a more customer-centric approach. Companies want managed services that are optimized for their precise needs, and that can adapt in perfect synchrony with the changes in their business. Specifically, we felt it was time to evolve our offering from strictly IaaS [infrastructure-as-a-service] and PaaS [Platform-as-a-Service] to move further into the hybrid cloud space.”

With this plan of attack in mind, Sigmax turned its attention to the infrastructure platform that would support its new offering. The company swiftly realized that its existing systems could not provide the required capabilities.

Hans Ruitkamp, Technical Manager at Sigmax, comments: “Our previous platform was too vanilla, had little built-in intelligence and was not software-defined. As a result, the provisioning of resources was very manual and time-consuming. Equally, without an integrated management tool, different teams of engineers were responsible for different parts of the infrastructure, leading to silos of expertise. It was clearly time for a change.”

Unleashing new possibilities

To support its new range of cloud services, Sigmax selected VersaStack, from Cisco and IBM. Combining Cisco server, networking and software components with IBM storage, VersaStack is a complete infrastructure solution delivered as a pre-engineered, tested and supported package.

Robbie Mulders states: “The joint proposition of best-of-breed solutions from IBM and Cisco that are optimized to work together was too good to miss. We believe in the relationship between the two organizations, and the long-term roadmap for VersaStack. Even better, our customers believe in them too.”

With support from IBM and Cisco to ensure that best practices were followed throughout, Sigmax itself handled the implementation of VersaStack at its primary and secondary data centers. Hans Ruitkamp comments: “The completed deployment was validated by a Cisco engineer, who complimented us on the end result. Together, the IBM and Cisco teams were able to provide useful tips and tricks that we are now using to get the most value out of the platform.”

Sigmax has begun migrating client environments to VersaStack, and is in the process of certification to become a provider of Cisco Powered Cloud and Managed Services. In deploying VersaStack, the company has gained the tools to deliver a range of different service models.

“We hand-picked clients that we felt would benefit most from the flexibility of VersaStack,” elaborates Robbie Mulders. “In parallel, we are investigating ways to bring new hybrid cloud capabilities to our customers such as bursting—which is when a private cloud is able to seamlessly and automatically extend into the public cloud to cope with a temporary spike in demand. This simply was not an option before we adopted VersaStack.”

Hans Ruitkamp adds: “By becoming part of the Cisco cloud provider community, we can reach a whole new set of customers. And with Cisco ONE Software, we are bringing true hybrid capabilities to our clients: they can choose between public and private cloud for different workloads, and manage it all through a single portal that we provide to them, built using Cisco software and VersaStack.”

Transforming the data center

With VersaStack, Sigmax is now equipped with software-defined storage and networking components, offering the company revolutionary new capabilities. Moreover, the entire solution can be administered via single management layer, enabling unprecedented control.

Hans Ruiterkamp comments: “The Cisco UCS Director component of VersaStack is a game-changer for us, dramatically reducing the complexity of our data center environment. It allows us to manage all of our servers as a single resource, mixing physical and virtual machines as we wish, and provisioning customer environments that span compute, network, storage and virtualization functions with ease.”

With deeper, more granular control over resources, Sigmax can dynamically adjust customer environments to more closely align with their business goals.

“With VersaStack, we can now look at our many and varied customer workloads and offer them tailored solutions that adapt over time,” says Robbie Mulders. “For example, customers can choose to run their most critical workloads on higher-performance storage, and non-priority workloads on lower-cost options. In this way, our customers can very precisely tune their IT capabilities and costs to the changing needs of their business.”

Sigmax is also utilizing Cisco One Software to build a self-service portal for its clients. Customers will be able to use the solution to independently manage many aspects of their environments.

“Our clients will be able to log in and self-serve a range of tasks, such as creating virtual machines, choosing between Windows and Linux operating systems, and provisioning memory and hard disk,” says Hans Ruiterkamp. “As a result, we can offer them exceptional control and business agility—a real differentiator in the managed services market.”

Leveraging the built-in storage compression and deduplication features of the IBM® Storwize® V7000 component of VersaStack, Sigmax is driving up both performance and return on investment. Currently, the company is using 10 percent of the available storage capacity, but anticipates adoption to rise sharply over the next two years.

Hans Ruiterkamp says: “Smart storage technologies help us slash response times and maximize utilization of resources. Since moving to IBM Storwize V7000, our storage performance levels have increased by 30 percent.

“We have achieved outstanding compression levels of 50 percent using the IBM Real-time Compression feature, which will help us accommodate expected year-on-year data growth of 20 TB. By allowing us to host more customers per storage footprint than before—without any negative impact on service levels—VersaStack delivers benefits both to us and to our customers.”

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Hans Ruiterkamp, Technical Manager, Sigmax

Taking flight

The new capabilities offered by VersaStack are making their mark on service quality at Sigmax.

“It has not been long since customers went into production on VersaStack, but already they are reporting performance improvements of up to 30 percent,” recalls Robbie Mulders. “Since implementation, VersaStack has delivered 100 percent availability, helping us support customers’ businesses with non-stop services.”

A spokesperson from Dutch green electricity provider Pure Energie, one of the clients migrated to Sigmax's VersaStack platform, says: "Sometimes in the old environment, SQL batch processing jobs were taking too long, causing the tasks running in parallel to fail and causing a direct impact to our business. With the new environment we don't see these problems anymore, with runtime for our most important SQL batch jobs decreasing from 1.5 hours to less than 30 minutes, an improvement of 67 percent."

By supporting Sigmax in diversifying its solution portfolio, the VersaStack solution is also expected to play a role in winning new market share. In an increasingly competitive industry, Sigmax is successfully distinguishing itself from rivals and proving its value-add credentials to prospective customers.

Robbie Mulders concludes: "With VersaStack, we have the ideal foundation to help us carve out a more established niche in the IT services sector. The platform will also serve as the launch pad for our move into the hybrid cloud services market, widening our appeal even more. Already, we have begun looking at opportunities in the areas of analytics and IoT, confident that VersaStack offers the agility to bring these ambitions to life.

"With a future-proof platform such as VersaStack in place, we can provide our customers with services that meet their analytics, business intelligence and big data needs, giving both us and our clients an advantage over the competition."

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Robbie Mulders, Commercial Manager,
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Solution components

- VersaStack by IBM and Cisco
 - IBM® Storwize® V7000
 - Cisco Nexus 9000
 - Cisco UCS Director
 - Cisco Unified Computing System

Take the next step

To learn more about how IBM and Cisco are working together to develop innovative storage and networking solutions for the data center, contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit the following websites: ibm.com/versastack or www.cisco.com/go/versastack

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