Charles River Powered Growth Through Virtualization

Rackspace helped Charles River leverage virtualization to meet the demands of rapid growth while improving customer experiences and modernizing delivery methods.

BUSINESS

Charles River Development provides an investment management SaaS to some of the world's largest insurance companies and mutual funds.

CHALLENGES

Charles River wanted to move its investment SaaS from customer data centers to virtualized infrastructure in order to increase efficiency and improve customer experience.
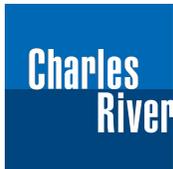
SOLUTION

Managed Hosting, Professional Services

PRODUCTS

Rackspace Private Cloud Powered by VMware®, Rackspace Application Services/DevOps

OUTCOME

Charles River has used its Rackspace-hosted environment to provide a better SaaS experience for its customers, contributing to dramatic growth and a larger market share.

Charles River Development

Founded in Boston in the mid-1980s, Charles River Development is an investment management software and services provider for some of the world's largest insurance companies and mutual and pension funds. Over 25,000 users leverage its investment SaaS offering to manage over $25 trillion in assets.

Before partnering with Rackspace, Charles River made a key strategic move. "We evolved from a software consulting firm to more of a solution provider — we shifted the focus to managing and hosting clients' trading systems," says Edward Fitzpatrick, vice president of operations at Charles River. "Many of our clients found it very challenging to manage the complexity of our software, so we created hosting services for the client systems. They could focus on what they do best, which is trading and managing investments, and we could focus on what we do best, which is running the Charles River software."

Leveraging hosted virtualization for a competitive edge

Initially, Charles River ran its SaaS out of customer data centers, but it soon realized it could significantly improve the customer experience and gain an economic advantage by leveraging hosted virtualization. A hosted virtualized environment would enable rapid upgrades and new feature sets and enhancements. "And on the infrastructure side we would get the economic advantage of sharing hardware across multiple customers," says Fitzpatrick.

But with trillions of dollars passing through its system at any given time, Charles River had to choose a solution carefully. After exploring their options, the company chose Rackspace Private Cloud powered by VMware. Rackspace then engineered a secure, stable and scalable VMware environment that delivered both the efficiency gains and enhanced capabilities Charles River had envisioned.

With Rackspace Private Cloud powered by VMware delivering a software-defined data center (SDDC) based on VMware technologies, Charles River benefits from end-to-end virtualization of the entire private cloud stack, including compute (vSphere®), storage (vSAN®), and network virtualization (NSX®).

"After our relationship with Rackspace and adoption of virtualization, our hosting business and what we now call our SaaS based solution really started to take off," says Fitzpatrick. "The timing was great because at that point, our customers had gotten more comfortable with the idea of outsourcing and SaaS-based solutions. So it all kind of came together at a great time and then has since taken off."

The success of the environment, combined with Charles River's robust efforts to win new SaaS clients and transition existing clients, created a new challenge: how to cope with explosive demand.

Powering rapid growth

As its client base grew, Charles River soon learned that its "traditional ways of deploying and provisioning systems were simply not fast

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enough," says Fitzpatrick. "They were still too labor-intensive."

Rackspace responded by aligning its internal support teams (sales, network security, storage, virtualization, etc.) to streamline service delivery. It also accelerated and customized processes to accommodate Charles River's growth.

And it worked with Charles River to modernize the company's delivery methods. "Rackspace has done a very good job helping us change the traditional delivery process, taking steps out of the provisioning process," says Fitzpatrick. "We've worked to leverage DevOps technology in terms of automated provisioning of servers and virtual machines, and we have our first application of that technology running in one of our environments hosted on Rackspace.

"We're also continuing to push the envelope to try to take time out of the process. We're talking with Rackspace about ways we can integrate our objectives of faster provisioning with Rackspace capabilities."

Adding value with Fanatical Support

While the Rackspace-managed VMware environment has provided great value for Charles River, the company has found additional value in the responsiveness and support of the Rackspace specialists it regularly deals with.

"We grew very quickly and we know we're a very demanding client, but what's really worked well for us is having stability and consistency in the account team," says Fitzpatrick. "They get to know us, they understand us. They understand our customers. They understand what is driving us and they, in turn, know what they need to do within Rackspace to deliver the services that make us successful."

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Fitzpatrick sees the larger Rackspace culture of Fanatical Support® at work in his interactions with his account team and other Rackspace employees.

"It's funny, I remember the first time I was introduced to Rackspace, I saw the slogan right there for Fanatical Support and I smiled," Fitzpatrick says. "It sounds great and I've dealt with many hosting vendors over the years and in all honesty, I have to say that it is true. It's much more than just a slogan. You can feel it when you talk to Rackers and you can feel the passion they have about customer service, that really is a key differentiator. Some of the bigger traditional hosting providers are solid, but they're just not as responsible and energetic in trying to meet customers' needs. So, it's far more than a slogan for us."