AFS modernizes disaster recovery strategy in the cloud with 11:11 Systems.

SOLUTION: DRaaS

Client Profile

Automated Financial Systems (AFS) is the global leader in providing real-time, end-to-end commercial lending solutions to the world's top-tier institutions as well as regional and de novo clients. Solely dedicated to the financial industry, AFS is uniquely positioned to support their clients' business and technology transformation, evidenced by their solutions processing more than $3 trillion in small business, commercial, CRE, wealth management, and syndicated loans daily. AFS clients have achieved measurable results in customer expansion, revenue increases, and efficiency gains that outpace their competition. AFS is headquartered in Exton, Pennsylvania, with an office in Brussels, Belgium. For more information, please visit www.afsvision.com.

The DRaaS You've Been Looking For

In business for over 50 years, AFS has a track record of industry excellence that few— if any—of its competitors can match. Today, it operates the world's largest and only fully integrated commercial lending system, with 25 of the top 100 banks using AFS products and services.

As CIO, Rad Laney is responsible for ensuring that AFS, and all its precious data, remains secure and available, 24x7x365. That's certainly no small task, especially when more business equals more data...and business is booming.

"We've, thankfully, been quite successful when it comes to adding and retaining customers. But inevitably, that success began to impact our IT operations, particularly our disaster recovery strategy," said Laney. "We were faced with having to build out our DR systems in a much, much bigger way than we ever had previously. It was a daunting task."

For the last two decades, AFS has kept its IT operations largely in-house, developing and hosting its own software. No strangers to "DIY IT," this meant Laney and his team were solely responsible for maintaining the company's business continuity efforts, which included operating two data center locations in Pennsylvania. Each site was configured to failover to the other and vice versa, keeping the business continuously available in the event of a disaster.

CHALLENGES:
- Legacy systems in need of modernization
- Strict industry regulations and standards
- Lack of geographic diversity among data centers
- Cost in time and money to manage DR internally
- Need for secure and reliable access to data

SOLUTION:
- 11:11 DRaaS for Zerto

BENEFITS:
- Continuous data availability and business uptime
- More internal resources available for business innovation
- Simplicity in day-to-day management
- Scalable cloud for business expansion

PROFILE:
- Size: Commercial
- Industry: IT Services and Consulting

THE RESILIENT
CLOUD PLATFORM

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Rad Laney, CIO of AFS

While this in-house system technically worked, it was becoming increasingly burdensome to maintain. According to Laney, the resources required to manage both sites—in both money and time—started making the legacy processes feel less and less like an advantage, and more like a hinderance. So, as part of a larger IT modernization project across the company, Laney and his team decided that it was best to change the company's approach to DR by partnering with a cloud service provider for Disaster Recovery as a Service (DRaaS).

"Like most in-house DR systems, our old set-up was quite expensive and difficult to maintain," said Laney. "We wanted a way to make our lives simpler and save some money. So, we embarked on a search, which included a thorough market evaluation, for a solution that could best accomplish our goals. We found what we were looking for in 11:11 Systems."

DRaaS-tically Improved Business Continuity

By the end of a months-long due diligence process, Laney and his team had their list of potential DRaaS vendors whittled down to three finalists. After careful evaluation, including selected proof of concepts (POC), Laney said their top choice was clear.

"11:11 Systems offered, hands down, the best DRaaS solution we tested. 11:11 DRaaS for Zerto is already a product, it already works. It's not like an erector set waiting to be built once you sign the contract," said Laney. "We wanted a product that was well thought out. From the usability and simplicity of the console interface to the flexible capacity, our team thought it was just a much better offering than the others we saw. We had it set up and replicating our three-tiered architecture in a matter of a couple weeks. It just worked."

Another key differentiator in favor of 11:11, according to Laney, was its ability to meet all of AFS' industry-specific regulatory requirements—of which there are many. While not a bank,

AFS is regulated like one, having to comply with the strict standards of the Federal Financial Examination Council (FFIEC). It also must demonstrate Recovery Point and Recovery Time Objectives (RPOs and RTOs) within a certain range—or face dire consequences. 11:11 offered all that and more, including a dedicated compliance team, which Laney can lean on to understand the complexity of maintaining these regulations.

"Some may ask: Why did we choose 11:11? Well, let's talk about meeting and exceeding expectations. 11:11 didn't just meet our RPO and RTO requirements, it demonstrated the ability to exceed them," said Laney. "We are required to meet five-minute RPOs, meaning we must be able to recover all transactions, all data created within five minutes of experiencing an outage. We also have an RTO of four hours. With 11:11, our RPO was in specification and RTO, the time it took to bring up our entire environment, took about an hour and a half. Once we saw 11:11 demonstrate those capabilities, that was all she wrote."

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Customer (and Skeptic) Approved

Transitioning to 11:11 DRaaS for Zerto aided AFS in another arena: Sales. Over the years, Laney has regularly fielded questions from customers regarding the company's DR strategy, discussing everything from RPOs, RTOs, and underlying technology. Data protection, as it turns out, is important to everyone these days, especially banks.

"There's no question that DR is a major sales talking point for us. I get in front of a lot of customers and they're always asking questions about our capability," said Laney. "Being able to confidently say, 'We can do a five-minute RPO and a four-hour RTO in the cloud with 11:11 and Zerto' is huge. It really assuages their concerns."

One common customer concern, according to Laney, was regarding the proximity between AFS' two data centers, which both resided in Pennsylvania. In the event of a regional disaster, like a hurricane or power outage, this left the company vulnerable to potentially devastating unplanned downtime. And while AFS is not bound by any specific regulatory distance requirement, some of its prospective customers were, making deals harder to close.

"The distance between data centers is often a matter of company policy or preference. For us, there was no regulatory requirement, but the same couldn't be said for our customers," said Laney. "And so, we kept running into this proximity problem. Some of our customers were required to get exemptions from their auditors. It just made everything a lot more complicated. Choosing 11:11, and having access to its global cloud footprint, allowed us to replicate our data at a safer distance, eliminate that concern for our customers, and still meet our RPOs and RTOs."

According to Laney, AFS' experience with 11:11 has been everything he could've asked for, laying the foundation for a fruitful long-term partnership. Perhaps most impressive, he said, was 11:11's ability to win over the toughest of IT critics: His team.

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◆ MODERNIZE   ◆ PROTECT   ❋ MANAGE

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