

Cloud Delivers for Food Service Company Operations Continue after Hurricane; New Efficiencies Gained with Best Practice IT Network

There are many reasons more and more businesses are moving their IT networks to the Cloud: easier system updates, reduced hardware and software requirements, greater data security, flexibility and scalability when the business expands, as well as redundancy in the face of disaster. [Food Authority](#), Oceanside, New York, a fine foods service and produce distributor, had plenty of business reasons to make the move – and learned the wisdom of its decision when the unexpected occurred: Hurricane Sandy.

Just two years prior to the storm, Food Authority had moved most of its network to the Cloud. When Sandy hit in 2012, the company's headquarters were under water, including its former server room (see sidebar).

Food Authority has grown rapidly since its founding in 1976 as an airline food service company (Air Stream Foods), and now boasts four locations and more than 300 employees. Today, it provides Commissary services to restaurants, hospitals and schools, making more than 400 deliveries daily to several states on the East Coast.

With that growth came the typical IT headaches: legacy systems were reaching their end-of-life; software was becoming outdated; and the availability and accessibility of on premise hardware was becoming a concern, not to mention, taking up space, as were dozens of pallets of paper records. Availability, Security and Storage redundancy for all that data became a high priority.

“These issues became a burden and a worry with our existing systems,” says Chris Beckman, Administrator for Food Authority, who manages both the company's IT and Customer Services departments.

Managing a diverse flow of daily business documents, like invoices, also created some complicated and inefficient work processes. For example, many of Food Authority's daily deliveries require modification at the point of delivery: customers might order 10 cases of produce, but decide on fewer upon receipt. Drivers had to adjust the invoices to ensure proper credit -- and sometimes those credits fell through the cracks.

Food Authority turned to the IT consulting firm that had designed its existing on-premise network in 2002, [AE Technology Group](#) (AETG), a full-service Managed IT & Cloud

“The Cloud allowed Food Authority to achieve all its immediate goals, in a way that was efficient for the long-term.”

Solutions provider based In Rockville Ctr., NY. The firm helped Food Authority design a new, “best practice network” that could meet the needs of its 24/7 business.

“This is a business with a 24x7x365 requirement for uptime that faces more challenges than many: there is the potential for product spoilage coupled with the need to deliver fresh food; the high cost of real estate for storing paper documents; difficulty with capturing and retrieving information; a desire to be “green” and have technology in place that could keep up with their continued expansion,” explains Marc Bellack, AETG.

Embracing the Cloud

In response, AETG provided a detailed comparison of both a new on-premise network, and a Cloud-based infrastructure, for Food Authority’s consideration.

“It was our view that the Cloud is where they should be,” notes Adam Kaplan, CEO of AETG. For Kaplan, the Cloud was a way to address multiple issues and concerns with a single action: Food Authority could keep up-to-date with the right software; they could maintain a higher IT standard; they could move to a more efficient paperless document capture and management system; have better security and the redundancy of storage needed -- and do it all in a way that was efficient for the long-term without the interruptions typical of an on-premise project.

“Not all of our clients are willing to invest in best practice networks, but for Food Authority, it was absolutely the right decision,” says Kaplan.

The Cloud-based Solution designed and implemented by AETG for Food Authority includes:

- A network of multiple Cloud Servers running on a highly redundant, virtualized platform
- Windows Based Active Directory Management
- AFS ERP software by [AFS Technologies](#)
- [KnowledgeTree](#)[®] Enterprise Content Management (ECM) software
- [CAPSYS CAPTURE ONLINE](#)[™] distributed document capture software by CAPSYS Technologies
- Enterprise E-Mail and Workgroup Collaboration
- [Fujitsu fi-4340C](#) Color flatbed document scanners
- VOIP for failover of phone service

Food Authority embraced the Cloud because of its belief in quality services for customers, and, its internal processes. “Corporate customers in particular expect a level of sophistication, and efficiency,” says Beckman. Many orders come in electronically, and all orders are processed through its ERP system.

“CAPSYS Technologies has a stable, tested, Cloud capture solution.”

“Going to the Cloud also gave us peace of mind,” he says. “We no longer had to worry about some part of the system going down, or the constant investments needed to keep the technology up to date.”

Capturing Diverse Business Documents a Priority

Making the switch to the Cloud required that AETG recommend a Cloud-based ECM and document capture system. Food Authority needed a fast and exact way to store and access information electronically.

KnowledgeTree ECM software was chosen because of its history, its open source foundation (suitable for Food Authority, which uses a mix of Linux and Windows operating systems), and its capabilities as a content repository. “We reviewed all of the ECM vendors, and concluded that KnowledgeTree extrapolated the best data, and was the right choice for Food Authority,” says Bellack.

Having the top ECM system was of critical importance for Food Authority, due to the diversity of documents handled, and, the labor savings inherent in electronic document management. “Our Accounts Receivable and Accounts Payable departments previously had two full-time people in place just to pull documents out of file cabinets,” says Beckman. “Now, everyone can access customer information right from their PCs, and the work is done in a second.”

Food Authority’s previous document capture software was useful to a point. Staff had some difficulty capturing documents that included barcodes, as well as problems finding data once it entered the ECM system. The old software also wasn’t updated frequently, causing interface issues with the ECM system.

KnowledgeTree highly recommended CAPSYS CAPTURE software, a web-based, distributed document capture system available in the Cloud.

“This solution is known in the industry as a solid, integrated capture system,” says Bellack.

In preparing the system demonstration for Food Authority, AETG received great support from CAPSYS Technologies’ engineers. “Support and training are always important, for us and our customers,” notes Bellack.

The software’s user-friendliness was also key. AETG found it was easier and more intuitive to use compared to other document capture solutions. “CAPSYS Technologies has a stable, tested, Cloud solution,” says Bellack, explaining that AETG had the advantage of knowing what had not worked for Food Authority, in terms of workflow. “Many companies make similar claims about their software, but our experience has taught us that in the real world, many of the other solutions simply don’t work.”

“Now Food Authority has a completely reliable, and secure, infrastructure. Technology is working for us, and we don't have to think about it.”

In Food Authority's Accounts Payable department, for example, barcodes are used to categorize data by vendor. The prior capture software could only read certain parts of the paper. If the barcode moved even slightly, the system would fail and would have to be re-set. CAPSYS CAPTURE software has proven much more forgiving, and scans the face of page more thoroughly.

“Many capture software systems can't do this very well. CAPSYS' Process Designer tool is able to pick up bar code details, regardless of where the barcodes are on the page,” Bellack notes.

Integration of the capture software with Food Authority's ERP system was accomplished by CAPSYS Technologies' engineers, who worked closely with the company to understand its business, and ensure that information flowed seamlessly. ERP integration with CAPSYS CAPTURE is done safely and securely in the Cloud, similar to how it was accomplished in the past using on-premise methods.

To meet Food Authority's need for rapid document scanning in its various departments, high-resolution Fujitsu scanners with customization capabilities were selected to support the new capture software.

“When you are processing from multiple locations 2,500 - 3,000 invoices a week, with some being as many as 10 pages long, having a distributed, web-based capture system that works to expectations is a real benefit,” says Beckman.

Multiple Business Benefits

The careful selection of each Cloud-based component resulted in the successful launch and a smooth transition to the new system in 2010. Beyond surviving and staying operational almost immediately following the Hurricane, Food Authority is realizing many other benefits of its new IT network.

“Now we have a completely reliable, and secure, infrastructure. Technology is working for us, and we don't have to think about it,” says Beckman, continuing, “Having the counsel of AETG is extremely valuable. They understand our needs, and know every inch of our system, so I don't have to be an IT expert.”

The Cloud gave Food Authority confidence in a fully redundant system, even in the face of a natural disaster. Major investments in hardware are a thing of the past. With a high-performing capture system, the company is greener than ever. System components can be updated easily and at lower cost, supporting Food Authority's success as it continues its rapid growth path in the years to come.

[Sidebar, slightly modified from prior version]

Cloud Services Keep Food Authority Operational After Hurricane Sandy Disaster

Food Authority serves its customers 24/7, 365 days of the year. When Hurricane Sandy hit, its headquarters facility in Oceanside, NY was under seven feet of water.

Fortunately, just two years earlier, the company began moving all of its IT systems in stages to the Cloud with the help of AE Technology Group (AETG).

Food Authority's new, Cloud-based data and document capture system, CAPSYS CAPTURE Online, is used to capture vital AP and AR financial information, proof of deliveries, driver's checklists and much more.

Initially, the company decided on the Cloud to avoid replacing on-premise hardware as the technology reached its end-of-life, according to Chris Beckman, Administrator. Food Authority management realized the wisdom of their decision when they waded in water up to their waists into their building the morning after the Hurricane.

"All of our inventory and computers were completely under water," says Beckman. "The old server room was under three feet of water. It was total devastation."

"If our IT systems weren't in the Cloud, we would've been closed for weeks after Hurricane Sandy. Instead, our ability to use our systems was seamless," he says.

Invited to work from AETG's offices immediately after the flood damage, Food Authority was able to connect its call centers to its servers remotely, and accomplish everyday business within just a few days of the storm.

"We were able to keep our delivery trucks running, stay open and keep our customers happy," says Beckman.

"It could've been a lot worse," he says. "Because of the Cloud, we missed only a couple of days. And, we didn't lose a bit of our valuable data."

"The Cloud gives us peace of mind," he notes. "In our 24/7 business, we need to know our systems are always a go."

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About AE Technology Group

AE Technology Group (www.aetechgroup.com) is a leading provider of Managed IT and Cloud Hosting Solutions. Its enterprise class services are made available to small and medium-sized businesses to ensure security and compliance in their respective markets. AE Technology Group employs a dedicated team of experts in areas of Data Backup and Business Continuity, Security and Compliance, Linux and Open Source Solutions, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Network Management, Hosting and Server Virtualization. Through the implementation of customized application and

data management platforms, AE Technology Group ensures a perfect fit for each customer. Contact AE Technology at 877.771.2384.

About CAPSYS Technologies, LLC

CAPSYS Technologies, LLC is a leading provider and developer of Web-based data and document capture solutions deployable as On-Premise, Cloud or as a Network Appliance for enterprise content management (ECM) and case management systems. Its software is designed to streamline the process of acquiring information securely and efficiently. Visit www.capsystech.com and follow them on Twitter www.capsystech.com/capsystem or Facebook www.facebook.com/CAPSYS. Or call 630.875.1900.