



Ameritas bolsters business agility and security

Insurance firm simplifies operations with Cisco Application Centric Infrastructure

“Cisco ACI is an operationally simple solution with an evolutionary path to hybrid cloud services. We will continue to lead with technology in everything we do, and Cisco ACI is at the heart of it all.”

Matt Billmeier

Director of IT, Ameritas

Ameritas

Industry

Insurance, employee benefits, and financial services

Location

Lincoln, Nebraska

Number of employees

2,482 employees

Website

www.ameritas.com

Challenges

- Simplify network operations to support agile application development
- Protect business and customer data from cybersecurity threats
- Create a simplified path to multi-cloud service delivery
- Use a variety of appliances and third-party solutions

Solutions

- Application-centric, software-defined networking
- Centralized, automated infrastructure management

Results

- Simplified operations and increased speed through network automation
- Improved security through application and data segmentation and automated threat detection
- Reduced networking capital expenditures by 30 to 40 percent
- Increased network operations efficiency by 25 to 30 percent

Founded in 1887, Ameritas and its affiliated companies offer a wide range of insurance and financial products, employee benefits, and services to individuals, families, and businesses. These products and services include life insurance; annuities; individual disability income insurance; group dental, vision, and hearing care insurance; retirement plans; investments; asset management; and public finance.

Empowering application developers while protecting customer data

Security and agility are often at odds, with the former impeding the latter. And yet, both are paramount for modern enterprises—especially those in the insurance, employee benefits, and financial services industry.

“Cybersecurity has to be at the forefront of a company like ours,” says Matt Billmeier, a director in IT at Ameritas. “But it is also the source of perceived delays.”

Ameritas has a big roster of application developers, he explains, with a mandate for technology-driven innovation and differentiation. Billmeier’s team must help them to bring new products and services to market quickly, while supporting the company’s high-profile cybersecurity initiative.

So when Ameritas decided to rebuild its two data centers a few years back, it needed to find a way to align these two divergent objectives.

“We reevaluated our entire technology infrastructure,” Billmeier recalls. “Security was goal number one; operational efficiency was a close second.”

Simplicity, scalability, security

At the heart of Ameritas’ new data centers are Cisco® ACI™ solution and the Intel® Xeon® processor-based Cisco UCS® servers. According to Billmeier, the powerful combination was uniquely capable of meeting the company’s needs for simplicity, scalability, and security.

“Cisco ACI is the most comprehensive SDN solution available,” he says. “It’s one big, integrated solution that supports physical, virtual, and cloud environments.”

While the software-defined network fabric has represented a “paradigm shift” for Ameritas, Billmeier says the user interface is straightforward and was easy for his team to learn. With single-pane-of-glass management and a common policy framework spanning both of the company’s data centers, network operations immediately became more expedient and scalable.

“You configure once and then deploy across the entire network fabric,” Billmeier says. “Cisco ACI does whatever you need, wherever you need it.”

Simplicity and scalability have not come at the expense of security, however. In fact, Cisco ACI has facilitated the segmentation of Ameritas’ application layer as well as its underlying data infrastructure.

“With our legacy environment, segmentation took a lot of time and thought,” Billmeier says. “But with Cisco ACI’s whitelist policy model, it’s built in. Nothing can connect to anything else without explicit instruction, so there’s less chance of a breach or miscommunication.”

Openness, integration, automation

The openness of the infrastructure has also been a boon, making it possible for Ameritas to take advantage of a number of appliances and third-party solutions.

The integration of Cisco ACI with Cisco Firepower® services, for example, has delivered automated threat protection to further strengthen Ameritas' data center defenses.

“We either had to hire an army of cybersecurity experts or leverage automation,” says Billmeier. “Less human intervention and decision-making means better protection and faster response.”

Ameritas is also using Citrix NetScaler, an application delivery controller (ADC) that is connected to Cisco ACI through an open API. And the integration of Cisco ACI with OpenStack is helping to automate private clouds.

All told, the combination of Cisco ACI and Cisco UCS is supporting close to 1000 applications. It has reduced capital expenditures by 30 to 40 percent in switching devices alone. And it has increased network operations efficiency by 25 to 30 percent, allowing for a greater focus on strategic initiatives versus repetitive, manual tasks.

“Infrastructure no longer holds up application projects,” Billmeier says. “We are much more responsive, and the escalations and complaints of the past are now few and far between.”

Looking ahead

Billmeier believes his team is just scratching the surface for what it can accomplish with Cisco ACI. He says additional intelligence—fueled by Cisco Tetration Analytics™ application monitoring and machine learning—will make the network smarter and more adaptable.

“We will be able to set the parameters and then let the network make decisions on its own,” Billmeier claims. “Cisco ACI tells the entire infrastructure how to behave and respond.”

In the near future, Ameritas will push those capabilities to the public cloud.

“Cisco ACI is an operationally simple solution with an evolutionary path to multi-cloud services,” Billmeier says. “We will continue to lead with technology in everything we do, and Cisco ACI is at the heart of it all.”

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Products and Solutions

- Cisco® Application Centric Infrastructure (Cisco ACI™)
- Cisco Unified Computing System™ (Cisco UCS®)
- Cisco Firepower® Next-Generation Intrusion Prevention System (NGIPS)
- Citrix NetScaler Application Delivery Controller