



Cloud transition boosts Steward Bank's service capability



How Liquid Intelligent Technologies Exchange server migration to the cloud, improved a financial institution's security, cash flow and ability to service its customers.

Although email remains a critical business tool, the inherent dangers of an overly large Exchange server for any organisation, much less a financial services business, are massive. For one thing, the larger it is, the more difficult it is to maintain, not to mention that when data gets accumulated at the kind of rapid pace and in the kind of huge volumes that is normal in today's world, the first concern is its storage. Traditional data storage methods and technologies are simply not effective enough to store big data and retain it well.

This is particularly problematic, because these contain data that is relied upon by enterprises, and which needs to be accessible when required. Essentially, these servers are the key to servicing customers, improving products, maintaining good relations with vendors and suppliers and generally ensuring a business runs at its optimum level.

However, the value offered can easily be undercut by the security concerns associated with this. Such concerns include weak password management and authentication schemes, which can easily allow attackers to assume the identity of legitimate users.

Accidental misuse of privileged access rights that can result in privilege abuse - when the privileges associated with a user account are used inappropriately or fraudulently - and the more malevolent privilege escalation, are additional issues. The latter involves a scenario where cybercriminals take advantage of vulnerabilities in database management software to convert low-level access privileges to high-level ones. There is also the challenge of system threats, such as missing patches or a lack of visibility, control and transparency.

Banking on the cloud

Threats like these are amplified when the organisation in question is a player in the financial services space, since these businesses are considered juicy targets by cybercriminals. Moreover, the complex nature of the business further opens these companies up to the challenge of accidental (as well as malicious) employee errors.

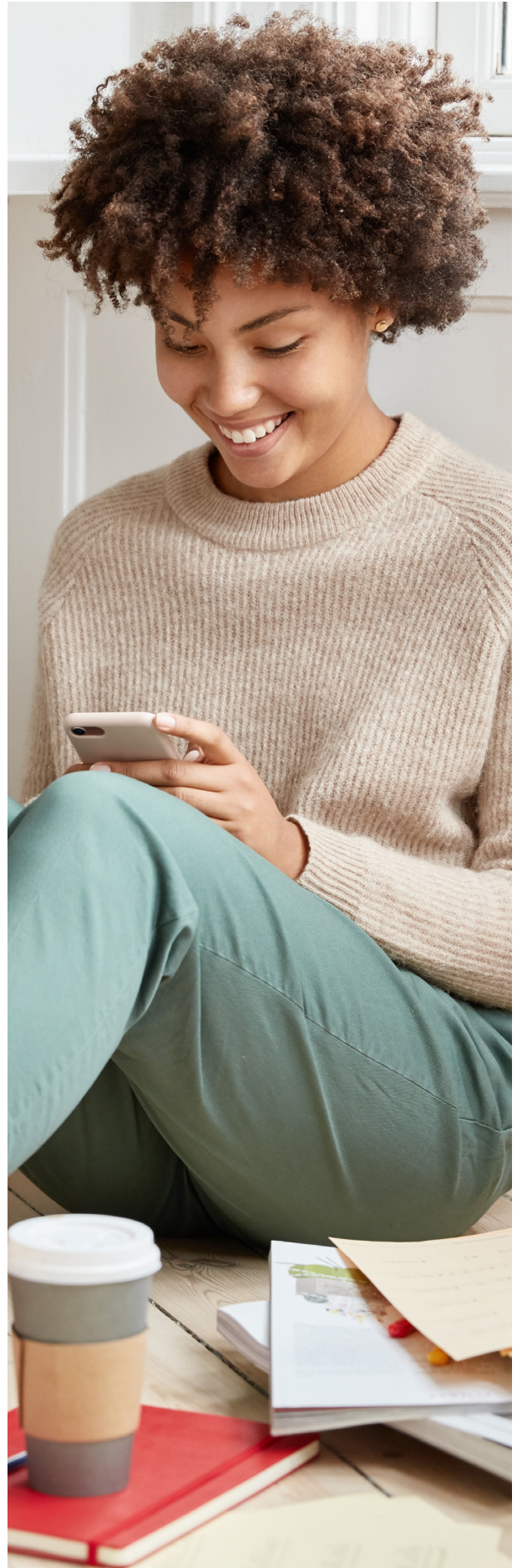
It was this combination of Exchange server challenges coupled with security concerns that needed to be addressed in the case of Zimbabwean-based Steward Bank. This is the first bank in the country to have convergence with telecommunications and is thus focused on providing banking solutions using technology.

In the case of Steward Bank, stability issues with the Exchange server platform created an enormous challenge for the organisation. Faced with the severe problem of a server that kept on crashing, not only creating the risk of serious data losses occurring, but also impacting its uptime, urgent action needed to be taken. After all, any financial institution needs at barest minimum 99.9% uptime, and for a bank that delivers its solutions using technology, more is ideally required.

Faced with the possibility of potential data breaches at worst – and the possible reputational damage, loss of trust, negative impact on revenue and potential trouble with the law that comes with this - and poor customer service at best, something needed to be done.

Thus, the decision was taken to shift to cloud services, ensuring uptime, improving security and, in addition, reducing the cost of doing business, thanks to the collaborative efficiency and high availability of the cloud.

To this end, the company turned to Liquid Intelligent Technologies to provide a new layer of cyber security, cloud, compute and other tech services, by leveraging its established networks and telecommunications infrastructure.



Thanks to the introduction of Microsoft 365, the monitoring and management of the security and compliance aspects of collaboration became more proactive and easier to manage. This, in turn, freed up critical IT resources to focus on vital areas of the business, thereby enabling Steward to innovate more and ensure that its customers are kept happy.

The sheer size of the mailboxes involved meant that the migration was undertaken as an Exchange online hybrid migration. Bandwidth to support the migration threatened to become a new challenge, but Liquid Intelligent Technologies' capabilities were such that a temporary link upgrade was provided for the duration of the migration, which proved successful. The hybrid configuration utilised has also been a success and continues to be kept active, allowing the bank to cater easily for temporary staff mailboxes.

Liquid Intelligent Technologies' comprehensive experience in managing service migrations proved to be especially useful, due to the sheer magnitude of the project. The bank was able to rely on Liquid Intelligent Technologies' vast technical knowhow when it came to ensuring this project went off without a hitch.



New and ongoing benefits

Although it is not a given that a move to the cloud will necessarily save a business money, in this case, Steward Bank eliminated the capex spend of some \$200 000 on-premise costs for Exchange Server and SharePoint Server. This money was saved by adopting Office365, which delivered more features and applications, for just one third of that expense, at \$66 000 per year. This was key for the bank, which apart from the reliability aspect, was eager to eliminate the replacement of equipment and licenses required for an on-premise solution.

Needless to say, when the Covid-19 pandemic struck and began wreaking havoc across the world, Steward Bank quickly realised that its employees could quite easily work from home, further reducing the costs that would otherwise be involved in having employees at the office. Employees have been able to work from anywhere and still collaborate as departments when solving customer issues.

At the same time, customer services and services to other stakeholders also improved significantly, thanks to the improved flexibility of the business and the fact that it is now much more alert to their needs.

Steward Bank is thrilled with the implementation, as - despite the inevitable attacks made on banking systems that continue, and may even have increased over the past year - the most significant threat Microsoft's Office365 has had to handle has been the occasional spam email, which is easily blocked by the administrators.





Apart from the technical and financial benefits of this migration, Steward Bank also attributes the migration to cloud services as the reason its customer service capabilities improved and became more efficient. The company adds that it is now anticipating a continuous trend in revenue growth.

As an additional benefit to ensure the broader success of the project, Liquid Intelligent Technologies has provided the bank with connectivity throughout all of its branches. Furthermore, all employees who are working from home are connected by Liquid Intelligent Technologies, which in collaboration with tools like Teams and SharePoint, has enabled employees to work efficiently away from the office. Perhaps most crucially of all, Liquid Intelligent Technologies Internet services have also improved the banking systems throughput and guaranteed response times.

By recognising a challenge early and bringing on board experts with technical and implementation skills to drive the change required, Steward Bank and Liquid Intelligent Technologies have begun a digital transformation journey that should enable the bank to remain at the forefront of its local industry for many years to come.

To see how Liquid Intelligent Technologies can help your business in its digital transformation send a mail to sales@liquidcloud.africa.