Sure Customer Case Study

First Central Insurance & Technology Group

Delivering the flexibility of the Cloud to a growing national business

First Central Group are an innovative and agile insurance and technology group

Challenge

To reduce the number of data centres used by its network and deliver a flexible private cloud environment for its insurance business.

Solution

A pair of resilient vCloud instances in Tier 3 data centres on Jersey & Guernsey, connected by ultra fast fibre.

Benefits

The solution has delivered faster more resilient service at significantly lower cost and with almost unlimited scalability.

"The combination of Sure's technologies and expertise have delivered the solutions First Central needs to compete effectively in the highly competitive motor insurance market."

John Davison - CIO at First Central Group

First Central
Insurance & Technology Group

sure. International

Profile

INDUSTRY

Online motor insurance, law and finance

STAFF

800 (45 in Guernsey)

LOCATIONS

Guernsey, Gibraltar, UK

Business Overview

First Central Group is the parent company of a financial services group with entities embracing insurance, reinsurance, insurance broking, property, finance and law. The group's motor insurance brand, 1ST CENTRAL, is a consistent top 10 seller on price comparison websites.

Headquartered in Guernsey, First Central Group is ambitious and is making strong inroads into the highly competitive UK motor insurance sector. One of its key industry differentiators is the firm's commitment to adopting relevant and useful technologies that will make a real difference to the business and its customers.

Requirements

As a group of six companies, First Central Group operates a complex network of businesses in highly competitive markets. A key pillar of its business is the technology that not only links different locations but, most importantly, provides the gateway to First Central Group's range of consumer-oriented businesses.

Whilst vital to achieving First Central Group's ambition of continuing to grow market share across its brands, the firm's technology layers must remain as topographically simple as possible to ensure the business maintains efficiency and effectiveness.

To achieve this, First Central Group wanted to appoint a technology provider that would reduce the number of data centres used by its network and deliver a secure private cloud environment for its insurance business. The end product would need to be sufficiently perfomant scalable, and flexible to nurture the company's growth over the coming years.

As a Channel-Island based business, First Central Group looked to use a local supplier, honouring First Central Group's commitment to support the economies and communities where they operate. Whilst this was the preferred option, it could only be achieved if a Channel Island firm could prove its value and expertise to the same extent as international competition.

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Situation

Following 10 years of impressive growth from its inception in Guernsey, First Central Group now employs more than 800 people across three jurisdictions, including 45 in the island.

As an award-winning employer and with a focus on the delivery of excellent customer service, First Central Group needs efficient, flexible, scalable technology to maintain the high standards that it has set and which its customers expect.

A considerable proportion of the company's annual investment is directed towards technology, representing the firm's commitment to be market-leading in this regard. It is therefore crucial to maximise the returns on that investment.

As part of its drive for efficiency and to reduce the overall cost of their cloud-based operations, First Central Groupwanted to consolidate its data centre operations, from five to just two, whilst at the same time maintaining on-island ownership.

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Sure's dual-island vCloud services deliver the efficient and flexible platform that enables First Central Group to do just that, whilst keeping the Channel Islands at the heart of the company's network and so helping to support the islands' economies as well as supporting First Central Group's operations.
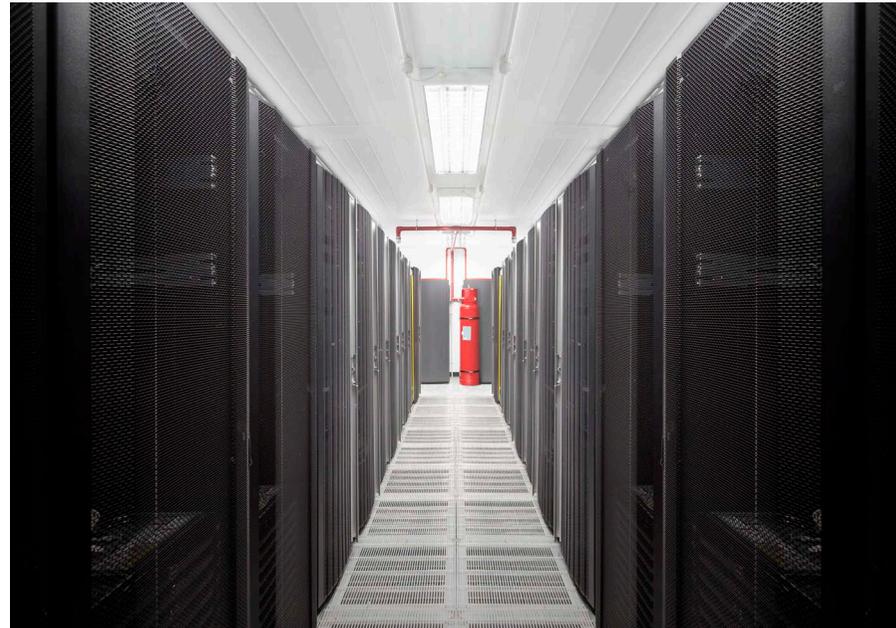
Delivering the infrastructure to support daily operations

First Central Group's customer-facing services operate seven days a week and with offices in three jurisdictions, First Central Group needs an infrastructure supplier that can support constant growth in customer demand as well as the middle and back office operations that help deliver it.

Following a competitive tender process, Sure was selected to become First Central Group's Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) partner delivering computing power, Channel Island-based offshore data storage and information networks via the cloud.

Operating as a managed service, First Central Group's network infrastructure can be modified when needed, even on a short-term basis. From computing power to server infrastructure, First Central Group's network environment can respond to variations in customer demand at a moment's notice.

Underpinning our services and First Central Group's systems, lies our Channel Islands zero point of **First Central Group benefits from Sure's unique dual data centre design. This puts the power of both Channel Island data centres at the Group's disposal.** failure, dual data centre network, which offers the highest levels of physical and digital security to protect servers and offering 24/7/365 access to First Central Group's IT team, so all issues can be dealt with at any time of day.

First Central Group benefits from Sure's unique dual data centre design. This puts the power of both Channel Island data centres at the Group's disposal, a move which enables the business to reduce the number of data centres in its network from five to two.

Protecting a growing business

For over a decade, First Central Group has leveraged technology to help its customers find their ideal motor insurance policies. In today's environment, a successful online business needs to invest in the highest levels of security to ensure it maintains customer trust.

Sure protects First Central Group's online presence with a managed firewall service that includes DDoS protection using Arbor systems that are capable of mitigating DDoS events of up to 2 x 10Gb. The system also identifies potentially malicious traffic and stops it at the network's edge. The managed firewall service also encompasses one of the world's leading next-generation intrusion prevention and advanced malware protection services, stopping malicious traffic dead in its tracks.
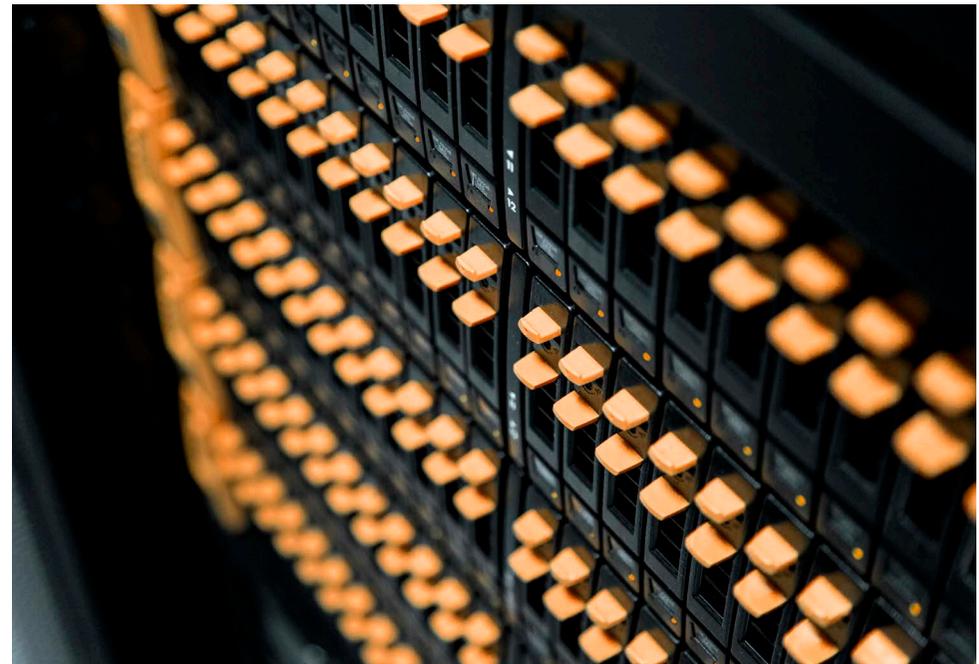
Delivering international connectivity

As well as using our IaaS services, First Central Group takes full advantage of our global Tier 1 peering options and has asked us to deliver a secure and consistent network environment across all of their offices in Guernsey, UK and Gibraltar. Such is First Central Group's confidence in our exacting standards, our dedicated Network Architect and Senior Engineers were asked to travel to the remote offices to carry out the full installation, migration and testing of each solution, thus ensuring that their offices would be ready for service, positively predictable and robust across the design.

An unrivalled cloud environment

Sure's vCloud Compute environment is designed for high availability and performance, using "best in breed" network, storage, compute and virtualisation technology. vCloud is securely housed and caged in Sure's own Tier 3 Data Centres, offering 100% resiliency, availability and security in all situations other than a complete natural disaster.

> **With in-built resilience and sub 0.5ms round trip times between the islands, First Central Group are able to run mission-critical workloads with complete peace of mind.**

It is designed with in-built resilience and its sub 0.5ms round trip times between the islands mean First Central Group are able to run mission-critical workloads with complete peace of mind, knowing that any disruption won't affect operations.

vCloud is a highly available Cloud environment, constructed with HP Density line servers equipped with high-end Intel

Xeon processors that provide high performance CPU, RAM and storage resource allocations. These can be dynamically scaled up and out, guaranteeing network, applications and data performance in all business conditions.

VMware vSphere and vCloud Director are used across the estate and offer next generation Virtual Machine and Application-aware hybrid and all-flash storage arrays, with built in analytics, one-click clone, snapshot and failover, all with zero RPO.

As an online business, First Central Group can't afford the bottlenecks created by traditional, virtual machine file and block storage arrays, an experience that is prevented by vCloud's hybrid or all-flash arrays, which assign each application in each virtual machine its own communication channel with real-time analytics.

Sure is the only provider with a tri-island carrier grade communications network, Tier 1 ISP peering and on-island Tier 3 data centres.

Sure is the only telecommunications provider with a tri-island carrier grade communications network, Tier 1 ISP peering and on-island Tier 3 data centres, vCloud meets all security, resilience and performance requirements throughout the Channel Islands.

Flexibility that only Cloud can deliver

Having chosen to partner with Sure, First Central Group knows that we can deliver, no matter what the firm's future choices.

vCloud is designed as a neutral infrastructure platform and so can enable deployment of any X86/64 supported operating systems and offers the option of both Windows Server and Linux templates, as well as Administrator options to deploy the chosen OS.

With resource being provisioned as either contended or fully uncontended, Sure enables 100% guaranteed, fully committed performance and protects the environment with both dedicated and virtualised perimeter security options.

Jersey

Guernsey

**Ultra Fast
DWDM Network**

IAAS
Virtual Data Centre

IAAS
Virtual Data Centre
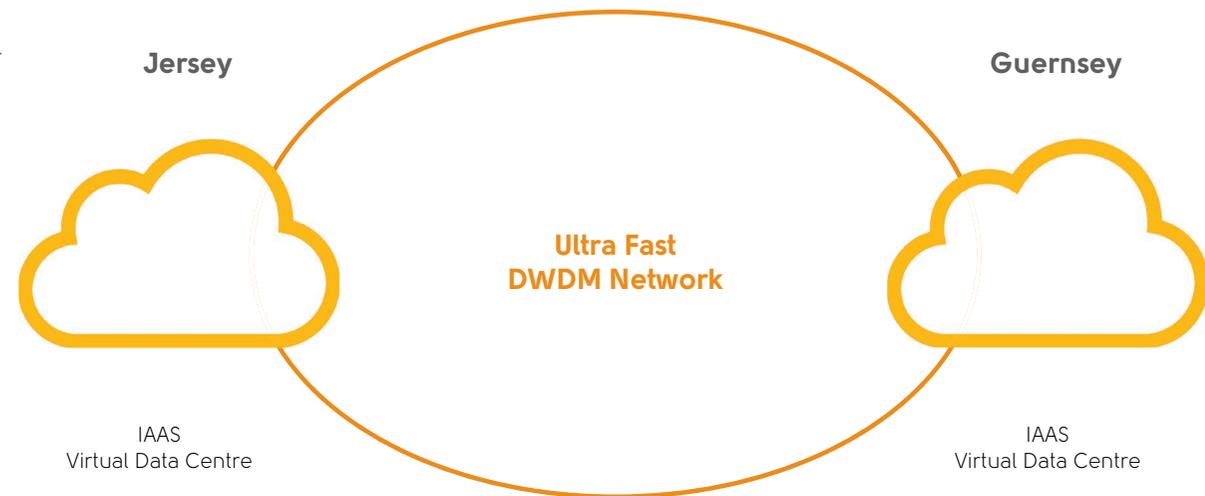
IAAS = Infrastructure as a service

Such a range of options means First Central Group knows it is in good hands and will continue to be for many years to come. Quality is assured with regular ISO27001 auditing and because the environment is fully on-island and comes with 24/7/365 support, First Central Group can enjoy peace of mind, knowing that Sure is there to deal with the tough times as well as the good.

The First Central Group view

John Davison, CIO at First Central Group oversaw the whole process of choosing a technology supplier and then seeing the project through to delivery. He continues to ensure that Sure's technology supports First Central Group's daily operations and growth plans.

"When we began the process of finding a technology supplier that would be capable of rationalising our systems and providing ongoing support for our ambitious growth plans, we hoped that we could find a Channel Island-based provider but were always aware that our business needs come first and so would not compromise on quality, capability and price, even if that meant choosing a provider from outside the islands.

"We were very pleased when Sure's proposal was priced competitively and also demonstrated the required expertise we would need to support our ambitious plans. The fact that Sure is island-based also proves that the islands have the technical skills and can positively compete with off-island organisations.

"In my mind there's no doubt that Sure was the right choice for First Central Group."

"At the operational level, the combination of Sure's technologies and expertise have delivered the solutions First Central needs to compete effectively in the highly competitive motor insurance market. Sure's Infrastructure as a Service platform gives us the flexibility to meet increasing demand on both a tactical and a strategic basis. In my mind there's no doubt that Sure was the right choice for First Central Group."

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