

Citrix and Microsoft team up to keep the City of Corona's services online during the COVID-19 pandemic



Challenge: The City of Corona needed to enable remote workers to keep citizen services online during COVID-19

The city also wanted to protect its data and services against natural disasters such as fires, earthquakes, and the pandemic.

Solution: Corona teamed up with Citrix and Microsoft to move its digital infrastructure to the cloud

By combining the power and security of Citrix Workspace and Microsoft Azure, the city quickly enabled all employees to work from home.

Results: An improved desktop experience for all employees and new flexibility to securely work from anywhere

Corona's modernized IT infrastructure unlocked an improved desktop experience for employees on any device and gives them the power and scale of the cloud.

The City of Corona is a local authority 45 miles southwest of Los Angeles, CA. It serves a population of 168,000 and is contained within just 39 square miles. Unfortunately, due to its proximity to the San Andreas Fault line and wildfire territory, its key citizen services (which were mostly provided via localized, on-premises servers) were one natural disaster away from being knocked offline.

Kyle Edgeworth, Deputy CIO of the City of Corona, remembers getting a taste of this back in 2018 when wildfires less than a mile from his house forced him to evacuate: "I managed to access my work remotely, but I could see the value [Citrix Workspace](#) will have for all our employees. We want to get to a stage where employees understand that everything they need to carry out their work can be accessed through Citrix."

Lately, it's been more than just the looming threat of natural disasters forcing the City of Corona to modernize their digital infrastructure – the COVID-19 pandemic has forced city employees out of the office and into their homes. The question for Corona quickly became 'how do we get everyone working from home so our services stay online, without sacrificing security and productivity?'

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Digital transformation made easy with support from Citrix and Microsoft

The City of Corona began its digital transformation in February 2017, establishing a cloud-first IT strategy and adopting [Microsoft Azure](#) and [Office 365](#). Soon after, the city partnered with [Citrix](#), seeing immense potential for combining solutions from both industry leaders.

“When we started on this journey of moving our servers to the cloud, there was only one cloud that was Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) compliant, [Microsoft Azure Government](#), so we moved all of our server infrastructure there,” explains Edgeworth. When it came time to build upon this solution, Citrix’s reputation made the choice easy: “We looked at other cloud products versus [Citrix Workspace](#), but Citrix was leaps and bounds ahead,” adds Edgeworth. “Citrix was already proving themselves in the government space and had a lot of features that weren’t available by other vendors.” By partnering with Citrix and Microsoft, the city of Corona enabled rapid digital transformation, helping them modernize for the future.

Building a solution to prepare for anything

The City of Corona had one goal as they embarked on their digital transformation: keep

citizen services online no matter what the world threw at it – be that a fire, earthquake, or pandemic. This meant finding a way to back up all the city’s data in a safe, off-premises way and enabling its employees to work from anywhere – securely and comfortably.

To do this, the City of Corona moved all their digital infrastructure to Microsoft Azure, deployed Windows Virtual Desktop for cost-effective virtualization, and implemented Citrix Workspace to enable employees to work from anywhere with ease.

Now, with the city’s data protected in the Microsoft Azure cloud, the risk of data loss in case of a natural disaster is effectively zero. Additionally, employees can securely access everything they need to do their job at home, on their own devices, just like they would if they were in the office.

Providing extra security for first responders

When COVID-19 hit, this solution enabled most city employees to immediately begin working from home, but not first responders. Public safety workers, such as 911 dispatchers and police officers, are obligated to meet additional Department of Justice (DOJ) security regulations and at the time, these connectors did not exist.

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“We didn’t have Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS) compliant security going between our virtual desktops and the cloud, so we went into COVID-19 emergency mode,” recounts Chris McMasters, CIO for the City of Corona. “We immediately began working with Microsoft and Citrix to build those connectors out for the first time. Within a few weeks, we were rolling and we got permission from the DOJ to use our solution for public safety personnel.”

“It was a first for the DOJ to approve that kind of infrastructure,” adds Edgeworth. “Normally, they require that all devices must be configured by IT, approved, and given out, but that wouldn’t have been possible in this COVID-19 environment. With our solution though, we knew we could provide a secure desktop environment, and when the DOJ looked at it, they agreed that we didn’t have to go provisioning everyone’s device because it was already secure.”

This decision wasn’t just about saving the city time and money on procuring and setting up new hardware – although the new solutions they’ve implemented have reduced hardware and cloud costs – it was about feasibility. When asked if they could have set up a new laptop for all the city’s safety personnel, Edgeworth says, “We couldn’t have done it. We tried to buy a bunch of laptops, but they were all gone. There was no way we

could have procured all that hardware and delivered it to our employees in time to keep our services online.” He went on to praise the simplicity of their cloud-based solution: “To scale this set-up, we just say ‘hey, here’s a website, go and log in’, it’s completely different than ‘go get the laptop, IT must physically configure it, make all their security adjustments, and have someone pick it up and deliver it to you’. It’s night and day. Plus, if we can reduce our expenses while providing a better experience to our citizens, it’s a win for everyone.”

Delivering improved, secure virtual desktops to all employees, from any device

The added security is obviously great and necessary to protect city data and achieve regulatory compliance, but to city employees, the upside of this transformation has been flexibility and consistency. With Citrix and Microsoft technologies, no matter which device an employee may choose to work from, they get the same simple, powerful, easy-to-use desktop experience. “Whether they’re at work or at home, it’s the exact same experience. They don’t know any different,” notes Edgeworth. “That’s really what we’re after: that same experience, that same desktop, wherever you are.”

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Not only is this experience more consistent for employees, it's more powerful. "It's a fundamental switch, right, because normally, we are used to having to go buy a computer that has a certain amount of memory, a certain video card, etc. Now, because the entire workload is hosted in the cloud, it doesn't matter what device you're using to connect to it," explains McMasters. "Our engineers, for example, are used to running Computer Aided Design (CAD) software on a \$4,000 computer under their desk. Now, they can do that entire workload on a tablet or a thin client device because it's running in the cloud. It's an economy of scale thing for us – we win every time someone uses the cloud – it costs us less, we get dynamic scale, and user gets whatever level of performance they need."

"Funny enough, I've had engineers tell me numerous times that they're actually having a better experience now than they did on-premises with their \$4,000 PC," adds Edgeworth. "Once I heard that, it was a turning point for me. It was like, hey, we won this."

Keeping Corona's services online while other cities shut down

The City of Corona's constant innovation has enabled their key citizen services to stay online throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. "There's been a number of cities around us that have had to shut down a lot of their services. We shut down almost nothing. Everything stayed operational," notes McMasters. "All our people started working from home. We quickly stood up call centers, for COVID-19 and other emergency operations, all through virtual desktops. We went hybrid and spread out within a few days—it was amazing."

When asked what type of feedback they've gotten from citizens on this digital transformation, McMasters said, "None. They

don't know anything's changed because our work just continues. Honestly, no feedback is the best feedback in this case because it shows that the transition has been seamless."

It's been the same thing for employees. "A lot of other organizations have seen furloughs and layoffs – some are having a hard time keeping the lights on," notes McMasters. "For us, we've been able to continue all of our services regardless of where our employees are, so we haven't run into any of that."

Building on this, Edgeworth adds, "One of the best things about this whole experience has been employees reaching out to us a few weeks after everything hit and just saying 'thank you, because without this digital transformation, I don't think I'd have a job right now' – that's huge."

Through their partnerships with Citrix and Microsoft, the City of Corona is setting a shining example for cities everywhere – demonstrating how to use technology to tackle challenging problems, protect employees, and better serve citizens. The future may be uncertain, but one thing is for sure – Corona has put tools and partners in place to continue innovating, unlocking new value for its employees and citizens alike.

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