



# Case Study

## Optimum Disaster Recovery Protection for Alphawest Double-Take offers stand out features that set it ahead of competitors



### The Business Challenge

Alphawest is a business of people, brought together by technology. Collaboration, and the ability to work reliably, wherever, whenever, are cornerstones of the business' success.

For a CIO or IT manager, this means the reliability and resilience of core systems is no longer important to success, it's paramount to survival. As staff become more and more reliant on the operation of core IT systems, the cost of an outage really starts to mount up.

**Alphawest's National IT Manager, Nick Watts**, had already made significant investment in Alphawest's primary data centre, located in the suburbs of Sydney. The implementation of a private internal cloud, based on **VMware's vSphere** platform and **NetApp** storage, was serving the business well and bringing much improved efficiency and reliability. Management costs were down, service interruptions few and far between, and the agility with which his team could respond to business needs had never been better.

However when it came to supporting Alphawest's business continuity requirements with an intelligent IT disaster recovery approach, Nick looked beyond the traditional approach of "build it all again, somewhere else".

The cost to Alphawest, and to its clients, of a major failure (like a total loss of the data centre facility) could be enormous. "But it just isn't practical to tell the business it needs to spend tens, or even hundreds of thousands of dollars replicating all that state-of-the-art infrastructure in another site, just in case it's needed. And it's not just the capital cost of all the servers, storage arrays, and blinking lights. It's the ongoing cost of keeping it secure, running, patched, monitored, tested, and fixing it when it breaks."

"Our business is our one and only asset, and we needed a secondary site to protect it from disaster. But like most companies we don't have the budget, time, or manpower, to set one up from scratch."

## The Alphawest Solution

The Alphawest/Optus Evolve Elevate cloud came at just the right time.

Alphawest already relies on the Optus Evolve network for its wide area network, interconnecting all its sites across Australia on a secure and QoS-enabled IP VPN network. "Optus Elevate is like a flexible, on-call, secure, and reliable secondary data centre that simply plugs in to our existing Evolve network. It's there when I need it, it's whatever size I need it to be, and best of all, somebody else manages it."

"It's a perfect fit for disaster recovery."

Within a week or so of subscribing to the cloud, Alphawest had virtual servers necessary to support its key systems up and running, and ready to go. "I'm a big fan of the transparency of access to these servers across our network. I was expecting to need significant network support in the event of a disaster, but machines in the Elevate cloud really do present as if they are located in your own data centre, or in the server room just down the corridor. They're right there, on your network."



## The Benefits

Apart from the simple connectivity and network transparency, the Elevate cloud solution has other significant advantages over "public cloud" offerings. Traffic to and from the Elevate cloud doesn't traverse the public Internet. "When it comes to compliance, I don't have the headache of our corporate data traversing the Internet to goodness-knows-where. I know where it is, how it's getting there, and I can explain to any auditor or senior manager why it's safe. This is really important to our business, and also to many of our clients."

The ability to self-provision virtual machines on demand in the cloud is also a key part of meeting Alphawest's disaster recovery needs. "The flexibility we have with our own private internal cloud, means we're constantly deploying, and right-sizing, our infrastructure for different needs. We scale up and down whenever we need to, because we can."

"If you've invested in virtualization, the last thing you want is headaches constantly trying to realign your disaster recovery environment with your production systems. With Optus Elevate, we can easily resize our disaster recovery facility to match whatever we need. It's self-service – my engineers do it all online. It looks so simple I suspect I could do it myself! I don't need to accept project delays and long lead-times for a third party to provision things for me. I get what I want, right away, and we only pay for what we use."

Cost-wise, the bundling of Optus Elevate with the Optus Evolve services has also made the transition to cloud much simpler. “Having our cloud services billed on our Optus Evolve invoice makes life much easier administratively. I don’t have the stress of a new supplier, and I have a single point of accountability for our cloud services – Optus provides the carriage, and the service itself. I only have one place to go, and far less internal red-tape to get there.”

The Elevate team is also working on integrating WAN acceleration appliances into their cloud. “We’re keen to be part of those trials. We use WAN acceleration on our corporate links, so it makes sense to make the most of that investment on traffic we send into the cloud. Again, it’s all about the seamless experience, and seeing the cloud as an extension of our own network.”

Naturally, a disaster recovery plan needs more than a reliable secondary site. Alphawest turned to its partner **Business Continuity** and their **Double-Take Availability** product. “It was as if Double-Take Availability was built for the cloud”, said Nick, “the product itself just worked, first time. Within days we were replicating several key servers into the Elevate cloud.” Double-Take Availability also includes the ability to perform disaster-recovery failover testing, the ease of which is something that is often overlooked when evaluating replication tools. “It’s all very well to “see data” moving from one site to another, but what you really need to know is that it will all work when you really need it.”

Double-Take makes it easy to test a failover – we completed a full simulated loss of our datacentre, failed over, tested, and failed it all back to production in about 3 hours flat. Our RPOs (recovery point objectives) and RTOs (recovery time objectives) were fantastic – because the replication to the cloud is continuous, and the Evolve bandwidth guaranteed, the window for data loss can virtually be as small as you need it to be”.

Alphawest’s IT disaster recovery plan for some key systems has also become far simpler and easier to execute. “In a couple of cases, it’s down from 40 pages, to about 5 pages long. That’s got to be helpful to our response when the pressure is on. Simpler plans mean less errors – it’s not rocket science that people under pressure need all the help they can get.”



Double-Take also boasts a bandwidth management feature, which you can use to make sure your replication traffic doesn’t overwhelm regular business use of your network. “It just takes a little tweaking to find the right balance between bandwidth consumption and your desired RPO. During our simulated disaster, we lost less than 30 seconds worth of work effort, with no data corruption or any other issue. If we delivered that in a real disaster, we’d be very, very, happy.”

## The Future

The success of the Optus Elevate cloud with Alphawest’s disaster recovery strategy has created much enthusiasm to take it even further.

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Initially, Alphawest's plans are to extend the same success to other systems – beyond the “core systems” and into all the other things in our datacentre that would help the business operate in a disaster.

“There's also no reason we can't extend the same strategy to business continuity plans for each of our sites. If we replicate our key infrastructure into the cloud, an entire site can just as easily be protected by the cloud in the same way”, explained Nick.

“I really look forward to the day that I can tell a general manager, “sorry to hear your building is flooded, but don't worry, I'll have your entire office up and running in the cloud in a couple of hours. Most of your staff probably won't even notice.” “I hope that message is delivered in person, because I really want to see their face.”

Beyond disaster recovery, Alphawest is also looking to the Elevate cloud to provide agile and transparent IT capabilities to its internal business units. “The cost-centre manager with a corporate Amex is becoming IT security enemy number one”, says Nick. “If they need a temporary environment to complete some testing, or to build a test-bed for a new innovative idea, as the IT Manager I need to be able to give it to them. If I don't, they'll find it somewhere else, and that could be seriously unsafe.”

“Using the cloud to make such facilities available means I have the flexibility to give them what they need, and it doesn't cost me anything to have that flexibility on tap. But I know that they'll get something quickly, reliably, and most importantly, it will align to all our corporate IT security standards. So once they've got it, I can rest easy.”

“Our foray into the cloud for disaster recovery really is just the beginning. It's time for a step-change in how we think about the provisioning, and availability, of IT infrastructure. I'm starting to ask myself, what would my IT strategy look like if I could deploy whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, and have it seamlessly available to all of my people, anywhere, and anytime?”

“That's really the world we're in now – and if you'll pardon the cloud pun, the sky's the limit!”