Who is Swiss Mobiliar?

Every third household in Switzerland is insured by Swiss Mobiliar. Active in all lines of insurance, Swiss Mobiliar had a premium volume of CHF 3.8 billion as of 31 December 2018. 79 entrepreneurially run general agencies with their own claims service guarantee proximity to more than 2 million customers at around 160 locations. Swiss Mobiliar is headquartered in Bern, Switzerland.

Swiss Mobiliar has more than 5,400 employees in its home markets of Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein as well as more than 300 trainees. It is Switzerland’s oldest private insurance company and has operated on a cooperative basis since its founding in 1826.
Swiss Mobiliar’s Container Platform team (known internally as the Vikings) ongoing mission is to better enable innovation by their application developers (known as the Feature-Team) and more quickly respond to ever-evolving needs of the business. Before turning to Rancher, they had been using vanilla Kubernetes for three years as a critical component of their automated continuous delivery platform. However, after having spent that time developing and deploying a variety of tools around their existing deployment, the Vikings ran into numerous technical and business roadblocks:

User authentication

Out of the box, the Kubernetes authentication is not very user-friendly and is difficult to manage as it lacks integrations with authentication providers typically used in enterprise environments. The Swiss Mobiliar team wanted to give their users the easiest authentication experience by integrating it with Active Directory. To do so by themselves would have required a significant amount of resources to build and maintain this integration.

“We’d been using Kubernetes for 3 years but it didn’t feel very user friendly and required high maintenance. We needed more.”
- Philipp Grossenbacher, Head of Container Solutions

Multi-Cluster & Multi-Cloud

They wanted to extend their Kubernetes deployment to support a multi-cluster and multi-cloud set-up. Again, to do this themselves would have significantly impacted the economics of leveraging Kubernetes.

Monitoring & Dashboarding

Their monitoring and dashboarding requirements for their K8s installation were extensive and complex. By leveraging Grafana, Kubernetes Dashboard, Splunk for log monitoring and a bespoke tool called Fabric8, the team had developed 6 different dashboards for their NOC alone.
What does NOC mean?

They also developed an in-house tool that enabled their developers to create namespaces during the development lifecycle process. The team found that they were spending far too much time maintaining and patching these customised management tools.

“The goal is to create a seamless environment where our developers can easily create new namespaces without caring where it lives - on-premises or in the public cloud.” - Daniel Strohecker, Systems Engineer

Hybrid-Cloud Strategy

Whilst their current Kubernetes environment is entirely on-premise, the business has made the strategic decision to adopt a hybrid cloud strategy. The Swiss Mobiliar team needed a container management platform that could facilitate this transition and, ultimately, give their developers a seamless experience when deploying workloads to any substrate. They wanted a ‘single-pane of glass’ for all their Kubernetes use cases.

The Vikings team at Swiss Mobiliar has an open source-first policy when selecting new technologies. Not only does this offer clear economic benefits, but they also value their engagement with the eco-systems that build up around the most successful open source platforms. They also appreciate access to the development team and like to feel they can influence the product roadmap.

The feature lock-in of ‘Open core’ products is particularly frustrating. When trialling new products they want to choose best-of-breed without feature locking mechanisms being used to force them to make a purchasing decision. If the technology solves their challenges and they like the ethos and values of the vendor, they want to invest in the success of the technology for their benefit and the benefit of the eco-system.
Swiss Mobiliar’s migration to Rancher is happening in two phases:

The first phase was the on-premise deployment described above and was completed in Feb 2019. This video was produced by the Viking team to announce the availability of their new Rancher-based Kubernetes service to the Feature-Team.

Later in 2019, the Vikings plan to prove that they can create a self-serving Kubernetes service based on Rancher that leverages both on-premise and public cloud substrates to deliver a seamless experience for their developers whilst saving the company money and minimizing risk.

For more information about Swiss Mobiliar Group or other public reference customers in production with Rancher, please contact us at sales@rancher.com.