

Choosing the Right Private Cloud Partner: A Cottingham & Butler Case Study



How the insurance brokerage modernized production and disaster recovery with US Signal ReliaCloud

Philip Niles has spent nearly three decades helping Cottingham & Butler's technology evolve alongside the business. Today, as Vice President of IT Infrastructure & Cybersecurity, he oversees the infrastructure that supports approximately 1,500 employees across one of the nation's largest insurance brokerages. With operations spanning property and casualty insurance, employee benefits consulting, and third-party administration, dependable infrastructure is essential to keeping the business running.

When its existing cloud provider announced it would no longer offer VMware, the platform Cottingham & Butler was using, the company had a decision to make. While the provider proposed a new path forward, Niles and his team saw it as an opportunity to step back and evaluate the market before making a long-term commitment.

Evaluating the Options

The provider's proposed path forward meant shifting to Nutanix, where they didn't yet have an established track record. For Niles, that raised more questions than it answered.

"There were a lot of unanswered questions about how that would all work," he said. "When I tried to get some of those questions answered, I didn't get enough information for me to be comfortable with saying that I was going to immediately accept their solution."

Rather than move forward with uncertainty, Cottingham & Butler expanded its evaluation. The team explored providers that could continue supporting VMware while also taking a closer look at Nutanix as an alternative.

Years of managing private cloud infrastructure had already shaped what mattered most.

"Things that really became important... were making sure that the environment we were operating in was really stable, reliable, and that it delivered great performance. Another one that was important was service."

Those priorities became the benchmark for every provider the team considered.



Why US Signal

As the evaluation continued, Nutanix became a stronger contender. Positive feedback from a trusted Fortinet engineer reinforced the team's confidence in the platform, while US Signal's experience with Nutanix made it worth a closer look. The relationship also mattered.

Niles had worked with US Signal Account Executive Ryan Beuc before and appreciated his approach throughout the process.

"I think he's been a great salesperson for us to work with. I believe that he really tries to do right by the client. So that was important."

Location was another consideration. Some of Cottingham & Butler's applications are sensitive to network latency, making regional infrastructure an important factor in the decision.

"Given what our options were within the geographic area that met our needs... I would definitely say US Signal was a good choice."



A Migration That Required Flexibility

Patrick Kiebler, Director of IT Infrastructure & Security, led much of the migration effort. Looking back, he says the biggest obstacles weren't technical.

"Some of the implementation challenges weren't actually technical challenges, but rather issues with procedures, bureaucracy, and lack of alignment on the urgency of our timeline."

The original migration relied on asking the previous hosting provider to install a Nutanix appliance into their VMWare environment. They denied that request based on their security policies. That meant the team had to pivot. Instead of using Nutanix Move as planned, they evaluated several migration tools before settling on Double-Take Migrate for Windows workloads and Acronis for Linux systems. Automation also helped keep the project moving despite the changes.

"We got creative when we had to in order to kind of keep things moving along."

Looking back, Kiebler says he would spend more time aligning timelines and expectations early in the project. Even so, he doesn't question the outcome.

"Ultimately, we got there in time. Everything's running great."

Putting the Platform to the Test

Once production workloads moved into the new environment, the conversation shifted from migration to results. Kiebler says the team noticed the difference almost immediately. "The solution has performed very well. I would say it exceeded our expectations for performance."

Cottingham & Butler wasn't moving from an underperforming environment. Its previous platform had been stable and backed by high-quality storage, which made the improvements even more meaningful.

"We've definitely seen some increases in performance that are actually measurable." For Niles, the performance of the platform right out of the gate was a confidence builder. "A lot of my fears about how it would all work were calmed."

Greater Control from the IT Team

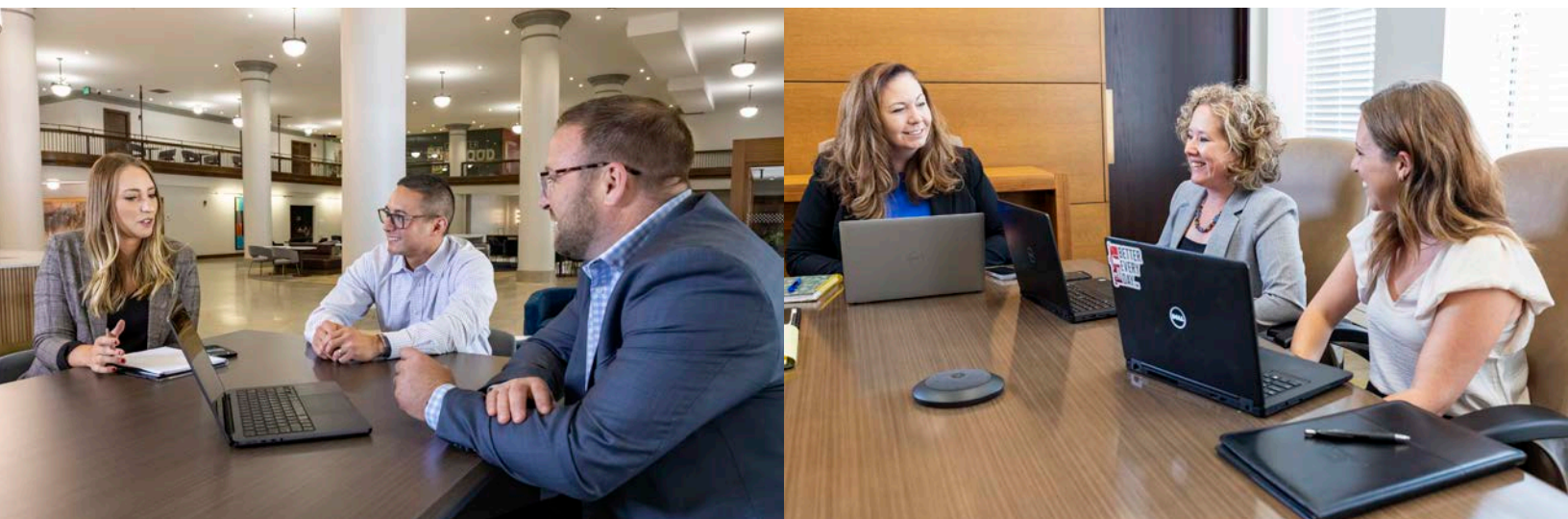
Performance wasn't the only improvement. The new environment also gave the IT team far more control over day-to-day administration.

Kiebler recalled one troubleshooting session with an application vendor that required repeatedly returning a server to the exact same state while testing different fixes.

"I just cloned a snapshot in like 30 seconds, and we had a clone server ready to have the vendor test again. That would have been probably a two-week process on VMware."

Niles watched the process unfold from the customer side. "The vendor asked us to reset the environment... and it's like, 'Yep, just reset it.' That really worked pretty cool."

The ability to manage snapshots, restores, and recovery directly has simplified troubleshooting and reduced the time required to resolve issues. The environment also continues to meet Cottingham & Butler's security and compliance requirements, including SOC 2 reporting and HIPAA business associate agreements.



Looking Ahead

Cottingham & Butler continues to grow, and that growth may require additional infrastructure capacity. Whatever comes next, Niles is confident the company made the right decision.

"I would certainly make the same decision, I felt that we got a really good deal."

When asked what he would tell another insurance organization facing a similar decision, Niles didn't hesitate. "If they would ask for a recommendation, I would certainly point them to US Signal."



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