



Discovery Takes Smart Approach to Cloud as It Pursues Global Growth

Industry

Financial services

Headquarters location

Sandton, South Africa

Employees

5,000–10,000

VMware footprint

CloudHealth®
CloudHealth Secure State™

Key features

Cost reports
RI Exchanger
Security vulnerability detection

Key benefits

- Costs are down 40 percent due to more effective management and reduction of waste.
- Reports on 62 cloud environments in 12 countries are now consolidated into one.
- CloudHealth enables customized, automated policies to identify immediate cost saving opportunities and take corrective action.

Discovery is an insurance and financial services company based in South Africa and with operations worldwide. By adopting CloudHealth and CloudHealth Secure State, Discovery Limited is now more efficient and effective in the way it secures and manages its multiple cloud environments. With the ability to mitigate risks and make more informed decisions around the cloud, the business is better able to accelerate its digital transformation and explore new opportunities worldwide.

Improving efficiency through cloud adoption

Discovery's core purpose is to make people healthier, and enhance and protect their lives. Discovery does this by making customers aware of their health risk factors and helping them make better decisions around health choices.

“We base our products around actuarial data and values,” says Johan Marais, senior platform services manager, Discovery Group. “The insight we find in people's behavior helps us model new services. Our customers' data is of the utmost importance.”

The business operates worldwide. It wants to be faster to move on new opportunities, introduce new services, and scale up when demand is evident. Discovery began its cloud journey in 2012, recognizing the need for scale, flexibility and global reach. Building out on-premises infrastructure in every global location was impractical, slow and unaffordable.

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Johan Marais, Senior Platform Services Manager, Discovery Group



Amazon Web Services (AWS) is the favored cloud provider, with local AWS accounts in action worldwide. Within the past 12 months, the company doubled its AWS spend and accelerated cloud adoption across the enterprise in a move to maintain flexibility and market leadership.

With a team of six people managing more than 9,000 servers, daily operations proved to be very challenging. The concern was the team was at risk of losing track of key operations.

Business was accelerating at a pace the team couldn't possibly manage alone, says Pierre Meyer, head of platform at Discovery: "Operations around maintaining good posture in the cloud became much harder. Business was moving quicker than what we could manage."

The business wanted to simplify the management of its cloud landscape by improving reporting and gaining visibility into all of its cloud activity via a single view. Where there were issues, the team wanted to be faster in taking action. The move would also improve Discovery's security and governance posture.

"We have an attitude here that we can build things from the ground up. We're a lean, agile team, and we move at pace," says Marais. "It's important we free up people's time, so we can focus on new projects. We want to be more efficient in the way we deal with the day-to-day things."

Leveraging the CloudHealth by VMware Suite

Through a single pane of glass, the CloudHealth multi-cloud reporting infrastructure enhances the transparency of cloud usage and its overall impact on cost, performance and scalability.

In addition, CloudHealth Secure State takes a fundamentally different approach to public cloud security. The platform improves visibility into security violations, and highlights the speed and sophistication of each vulnerability, updating in near real time to understand both the direct and correlated risks of change.

"CloudHealth provides a centralized, standardized view of our cloud activity, then CloudHealth Secure State comes in from the side and tells us how compliant our security posture is," says Marais.

CloudHealth analyzes asset performance metrics to help Discovery visualize and correct underutilized resources. The CloudHealth cost reports and RI Exchanger features give Discovery a holistic view of cost savings across all accounts, simplifying the reporting process. The business can then identify opportunities to reduce costs based on Reserved Instance (RI) usage trends. To further help Marais' team, CloudHealth enables customized, automated policies to identify immediate cost saving opportunities and take corrective action.

"CloudHealth discovers all different configurations, then CloudHealth Secure State tells us the risk factors in the event of any changes. It's almost like we're self-healing our cloud space in real time."

Johan Marais, Senior Platform Services Manager, Discovery Group

Other solutions were considered, but Marais says, "The biggest thing for us was, because we were already a consumer of VMware solutions, we could see more integration coming down the line."



Discovery has high expectations of its vendors, he continues. It's important that solutions are up and running quickly, with a clear idea of ROI.

"There are a lot of players in the cloud space, lots of free and open source tool sets. However, do we really want to deal with another vendor and another engagement model? VMware was a natural fit; we understood the value of the CloudHealth by VMware Suite™; we didn't have to reinvent the account," says Marais.

Accelerating digital transformation

Discovery is now more efficient and effective in the way it manages its multiple cloud environments. By being able to make more informed decisions around cloud, the business is better able to accelerate its digital transformation and explore new opportunities worldwide.

While Discovery's investment in cloud doubled from 2018–2019, says Marais, costs are down 40 percent due to more effective management and reduction of waste. Reports are generated on demand rather than days, as previously was the case, and there is a clear sense of how cloud is being used. Automation means Discovery avoids the need to employ two new FTEs to manage reporting and security.

"CloudHealth, for the first time, creates a single view of our cloud activity, across multiple territories," says Marais. "We're no longer hunting for information. It's all there at the click of a button."

This strengthens the link between operations and security teams, he says, establishing a single version of truth. Reports on 62 cloud environments in 12 countries are now consolidated into one.

Efficiency is wonderful, he continues, but it's data security and industry compliance that are most critical to the business.

"Again, we now have a single view, which helps us understand how good or bad we are in different parts of the world. CloudHealth Secure State not only identifies any potential issues, but it also ranks them in order of risk. It means we're more effective in focusing our attention on the most critical risks," says Marais.

For any business pressured to grow quickly or get new applications to market before the competition, there's a temptation to cut corners. CloudHealth Secure State allows the team to visualize security posture, see how different objects are connected, and then prioritize all issues based on risk. The object graph in particular tells you how big the problem is, and makes it easier for all stakeholders to quickly get on the same page, says Marais: "CloudHealth discovers all different configurations, then CloudHealth Secure State tells us the risk factors in the event of any changes. Because it's event-based, we're notified immediately. It's almost like we're self-healing our cloud space in real time."

Looking ahead

Cloud will continue to provide Discovery with the best means to scale and move quickly as it expands worldwide. Marais says, thanks to CloudHealth, the future will see more informed decisions as to the best cloud environment for different projects and different territories.

"We can tie together cost, security and performance in a single view, and make the right decisions. Each cloud provider is unique, they all have their advantages. What we see in VMware is a business that is on the same journey as us. It's a great comfort to us that VMware is aligned on security and transparency issues," says Marais.