Woche-Pass Protects Production Capabilities with VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery

Woche-Pass AG is a media house in Sursee, Switzerland. It originally launched as a print shop in 1975 before publishing its first weekly local guide in 1985. In 2011, the company acquired Wochen-Post. Today, the company runs a successful website plus two weekly printed publications and digital guides.

Industry
Media Publishing

Strategic priorities
• Cloud Transformation

Partner
BitHawk AG provides IT and enterprise service management solutions, consultancy, engineering and operations. The company employs around 200 qualified specialists, advising customers on creating a long-term adaptable IT environment.

VMware footprint
• VMware® vSphere®

• VMware Cloud™ on AWS

• VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery™

Swiss media house Woche-Pass relies on software and on-premises data servers to produce its weekly local guide. Any threat to production can result in content not being ready for that week's issue—costing the business over CHF 150,000 in lost sales. After unplanned downtime left the company nearly missing a deadline, Woche-Pass decided to overhaul its approach to disaster recovery. The company invested in VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery, deployed by local IT partner, BitHawk. Now, if there are any major operational issues, the company's virtual machines are constantly replicated with VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery and can get up and running again within minutes on VMware Cloud on AWS.

Preparing for constant industry change

For nearly 50 years, Woche-Pass has evolved its business in line with continually changing media consumption. After launching as a small print shop in the 1970s, the company started publishing a weekly periodical in 1985, detailing local events, businesses and job opportunities. Since then, Woche-Pass has grown from a 32-page guide to over 200 pages per issue, with a weekly print circulation of 35,000 to 45,000 copies. The company has also been producing a larger digital edition since 2016. "Our reputation is everything," says Adrian Hess, CEO, Woche-Pass. "A lot of events that take place in the area are published by us."

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Diverse threats challenge production

Operational reliability is critical to the success of Woche-Pass. All design work is completed in-house, and its staff relies on creative software and on-premises data servers to do their jobs effectively. Missing the weekly publication deadline would result in Woche-Pass losing vital sales and advertising revenue, plus the reputational damage of disappointing its readers.

To mitigate the risk of unplanned downtime, Woche-Pass invested in a disaster recovery system. However, its production and disaster recovery infrastructure were coupled to the same network. This meant production had to be stopped while the disaster recovery system was being tested.

With tight deadlines to fulfill, the system was tested infrequently, and changes made on the production site were not always deployed to the disaster recovery site. As a result, when the company experienced a real system outage, it almost missed a print deadline.

"We had a disaster recovery solution that we'd paid a lot of money for, but it didn't work properly," explains Hess. "Then we had a real disaster and could only access services to a limited extent. We needed to make sure a scenario like that never occurred again." The near-miss gave Woche-Pass a wake-up call. The company urgently needed to invest in a disaster recovery solution that could get its digital infrastructure back up and running as quickly as possible.

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>
> Adrian Hess, CEO, Woche-Pass

Decoupling disaster recovery and production systems

To protect its digital operations from a diverse range of threats, Woche-Pass needed a disaster recovery solution that was decoupled from its existing infrastructure. This would allow the company to launch a new disaster recovery site and complete testing without impacting production.

As a small company with limited in-house IT capabilities, Woche-Pass recognized the need for specialist support. Woche-Pass enlisted the local IT partner, BitHawk, to research a new approach.

As Woche-Pass was already using VMware vSphere in its data center to virtualize servers, BitHawk recommended VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery: a disaster recovery as a service (DRaaS) solution that replicates virtual machines into the cloud based on VMware Cloud on AWS. This solution is a cost-effective, scalable and secure hybrid cloud service for migrating applications from on-premises to the cloud without needing application refactoring or re-architecting.

"We needed a disaster recovery solution that was affordable and would work when we needed it," Hess explains. "VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery isn't just a service for customers with a thousand virtual machines. It also caters to small companies like Woche-Pass."

In February 2022, BitHawk deployed VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery and VMware Cloud on AWS for Woche-Pass. As VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery is a relatively new solution, BitHawk became the first IT service provider in EMEA to deploy it as a service, using Woche-Pass as a proof of concept.

It took less than a day to complete the initial setup before BitHawk used VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery to replicate the company's existing production data in the cloud. VMware provided BitHawk with product management, technology and commercial expertise during this process, to ensure the project ran as smoothly as possible.

"The proof of concept worked extremely well," Hess says. "We tested it once, made fine adjustments and then the disaster recovery site was up and running very quickly. From my point of view, that's very cool."

> "If a real disaster situation occurs, we are confident that we'll be live with the disaster recovery site within a short time."

Adrian Hess, CEO, Woche-Pass

Rapid response to disaster recovery

Decoupling its production and disaster recovery infrastructure using VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery has enabled Woche-Pass to test its disaster recovery solution. In case of a disaster the virtual machines are spinned up directly on VMware Cloud on AWS with the same IP addresses as on-premises and are ready to go into production within minutes. And if an attacker is on the infrastructure, they cannot manipulate data on VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery.

The system runs continuous health checks to quickly identify and investigate any issues. PDF reports from disaster recovery actions like tests are made available to the business for auditing and management purposes. In addition, data is automatically uploaded to the cloud every 30 minutes as part of scheduled protection plans.

"With VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery, we can carry out better testing, so we know that everything works," explains Hess. "If a real disaster situation occurs, we are confident that we'll be live with the disaster recovery site within a short time."

VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery has also given the media house a solution that can scale with its technology stack. Any new virtualized server is automatically integrated into the disaster recovery system.

All these benefits have been achieved with minimal operational disruption. Since it's cloud-based, no major changes were required for Woche-Pass to use the disaster recovery solution, and there has been no conceptual impact on the company as it is now using dedicated VPN client-to-site technology.

Protecting production with limited in-house IT resources

Onboarding VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery has given Woche-Pass operational security in the event of unplanned downtime, despite limited IT resources in-house. Senior staff members can log in to the system at any point to make sure everything is functioning well, automatically generating a support case for VMware if something is not right.

To facilitate this process, BitHawk has developed a disaster recovery manual that helps Woche-Pass identify a disaster case and switch over to a safe business-generating manner as quickly as possible.

An improved disaster recovery infrastructure also benefits the readership of Woche-Pass, as the chance of publication delays or missed issues is now minimized. The project has benefited the company's IT service provider, too. Following this successful proof of concept, BitHawk has launched VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery as a service within its portfolio and demonstrated its ability in service continuity management.

Fine-tuning for a scalable future

With VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery up and running successfully, Woche-Pass is now focused on fine-tuning its security and hardware lifecycle and replacing old operating systems to enhance its production capabilities. Hess has already committed to scheduling tests every six months to keep improving the company's disaster recovery response and make sure it works.

As for BitHawk, Woche-Pass has provided a valuable use case for VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery as a service—proving that a cutting-edge disaster response solution like VMware Cloud Disaster Recovery is accessible to smaller businesses as well as large enterprises.