

# Security vs. agility: Aligning divergent forces



Cisco and Intel® partnering in innovation



How an insurance leader is using software-defined networking to boost the speed—and protection—of its business.

Security and agility are often at odds, with the former impeding the latter. And yet, both are paramount for modern enterprises—especially those in the insurance and financial services industry.

“Cybersecurity has to be at the forefront of a company like ours,” says Matt Billmeier, a director in IT at Ameritas. “But it is also the source of perceived delays.”

Ameritas has a big roster of application developers, he explains, with a mandate for technology-driven innovation and differentiation. Billmeier’s team must enable them to bring new products and services to market quickly, while supporting the company’s high-profile cybersecurity initiative.

So when Ameritas decided to rebuild its two data centers a few years back, it needed to find a way to align these two divergent forces.

“We reevaluated our entire technology infrastructure,” Billmeier recalls. “Security was goal number one, operational efficiency was a close second.”

## SIMPLICITY, SCALABILITY, SECURITY

At the heart of Ameritas' new data centers are Cisco® Application Centric Infrastructure (Cisco ACI™) and the Intel® Xeon® processor-based Cisco Unified Computing System™ (Cisco UCS®). According to Billmeier, the powerful combination was uniquely capable of meeting the company's needs for simplicity, scalability, and security.

"Cisco ACI is the most comprehensive SDN solution available," he says. "It's one big, integrated solution that supports physical, virtual, and cloud environments."

While the software-defined network fabric represented a "paradigm shift" for Ameritas, Billmeier says the user interface is straightforward and was easy for his team to learn. With single-pane-of-glass management and a common policy framework spanning both of the company's data centers, network operations immediately became more expedient and scalable.

"You configure once and then deploy across the entire network fabric," Billmeier says. "Cisco ACI does whatever you need, wherever you need it."

Simplicity and scalability have not come at the expense of security, however. In fact, Cisco ACI has facilitated the segmentation of Ameritas' application layer as well as its underlying data infrastructure.

"With our legacy environment, segmentation took a lot of time and thought," Billmeier says. "But with Cisco ACI's whitelist policy model, it's built in. Nothing can connect to anything else without explicit instruction, so there's less chance of a breach or miscommunication."

## LEADING WITH TECHNOLOGY

All told, the combination of Cisco ACI and Cisco UCS is supporting close to 1000 applications at Ameritas. It has reduced CapEx by 30 to 40 percent in switching devices alone. And it has increased network operations efficiency by 25 to 30 percent, allowing for a greater focus on strategic initiatives versus repetitive, manual tasks.

"Infrastructure no longer holds up application projects," Billmeier says. "We are much more responsive, and the escalations and complaints of the past are now few and far between."

Billmeier believes his team is just scratching the surface for what it can accomplish with Cisco ACI. He says additional intelligence—fueled by Cisco Tetration™ application monitoring and machine learning—will make the network smarter and more adaptable.

"We will be able to set the parameters and then let the network make decisions on its own," Billmeier claims. "Cisco ACI tells the entire infrastructure how to behave and respond."

In the near future, Ameritas will push those capabilities to the public cloud.

"Cisco ACI is an operationally simple solution with an evolutionary path to multi-cloud services," Billmeier says. "We will continue to lead with technology in everything we do, and Cisco ACI is at the heart of it all."



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To learn more about the industry's leading SDN solution, visit the [Cisco ACI resources page](#).