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Profile

Company

Digital Chocolate

Segment

Game

Location

North America

Website

www.digitalchocolate.com



Introduction

Digital Chocolate is a leading provider of social games played across social networks and mobile platforms. The company's top hits include Galaxy Life, Millionaire City, Zombie Lane, Army Attack, Crazy Penguin Wars, Tower Bloxx, and Rollercoaster Rush. The iPhone version of Rollercoaster Rush was a Top Five download in the Apple App Store – and is part of a franchise that has achieved more than 15 million downloads.

Digital Chocolate was the number one software company in App Store downloads in 2009, and was one of the fastest-growing publishers of Facebook social games with virtual goods in 2010. The company was founded in 2003 by Trip Hawkins, the founder of Electronic Arts, and has 300 employees. Headquartered in San Mateo, California, Digital Chocolate works with 200 leading web and mobile channel partners in 80 countries, and has offices in Finland, Spain, and India.

As the popularity of Digital Chocolate's social games exploded, so did the company's IT infrastructure costs. COO Jason Loia migrated his infrastructure to Joyent Cloud hoping to achieve new levels of reliability and performance while protecting Digital Chocolate's profit margins across its games portfolio.

The Challenge

Recognizing the seemingly limitless potential of the social gaming space, Electronic Arts founder Trip Hawkins launched Digital Chocolate in 2003. After staking its claim in the mobile space, the company expanded its focus to online social games. Digital Chocolate quickly became a top game publisher, rapidly launching hit games to rival those of major competitors. To the delight of Digital Chocolate's leadership, the company quickly achieved success in a critical metric for online gaming companies: daily active users (DAUs).

As Digital Chocolate's DAU base grew, however, so did its infrastructure costs. At first, supporting the explosive DAU growth was the company's primary focus. But as the business evolved and the complexity of supporting games increased, it became clear that Digital Chocolate required a more flexible solution to accommodate its needs.

Cut costs and improve profits per game

As Digital Chocolate continued to create new games and support existing ones, the company had to make sure its costs per DAU didn't exceed its revenue per DAU. With Digital Chocolate's incumbent cloud infrastructure provider, sudden bursts of bandwidth usage often drove up costs, jeopardizing the profitability of some games.

Ensure maximum performance. With new users discovering Digital

Chocolate each day and games' constantly-changing userbase, the company needed to work with a cloud infrastructure specifically built for today's most demanding applications. Digital Chocolate's specific needs? Instant scalability and the highest levels of performance.

Adapt to the company's needs

As Digital Chocolate evaluated potential cloud partners, it presented vendors with a wide variety of unique needs. For instance, due to the unpredictable and fragmented nature of its user base, Digital Chocolate was looking for a cost-effective way to perform iterative load testing. Digital Chocolate asked vendors to present pricing scenarios for various service level agreements (SLAs) – but most bidders weren't flexible enough to accommodate the company's wishes.

The Solution

Joyent approached Digital Chocolate COO Jason Loia with a cloud architecture design that would offer unparalleled efficiency and performance while reducing his company's infrastructure costs by 30% or more. Savings like these would allow Digital Chocolate to devote more of its resources to developing games, not just maintaining the infrastructure. Based on his experiences with his incumbent cloud provider's systems and discussions with other providers, Loia was initially skeptical about these promises. But he finally agreed to pilot one of Digital Chocolate's smaller game footprints on Joyent Cloud for a 60-day test.

Within 45 days, Loia was a believer, and had begun migrating Digital Chocolate's entire game portfolio to Joyent. Joyent Cloud delivered the reliability and quality of service Loia had hoped for, while streamlining Digital Chocolate's infrastructure footprint. With Joyent, Loia gained cost predictability, deep visibility "under the hood," and granular control over the exact dials he wanted to control.

A 50% reduction in infrastructure costs

Joyent's cost-effectiveness has completely changed Digital Chocolate's cost structure. In fact, the profitability of each of the company's games dramatically improved once Digital Chocolate went live on Joyent. With lower overhead and the ability to project its infrastructure costs each month, the company is now in a much healthier position for sustainable growth.

Reliable performance

Loia believes a cloud provider doesn't really prove itself until the first product roll-out – but he reports that Joyent passed this test with ease. He appreciates Joyent's "solid SLA metrics," no I/O fees, and performance that's "on par with the major incumbents." The key to success? The Joyent cloud extends performance by allowing applications to instantly and automatically burst into large CPU pools at no charge. Each Joyent SmartMachine can burst up to 400% instantly to handle large spikes in usage or traffic.

A flexible, supportive partner

"We have unique needs in almost every aspect of our business – from pricing to SLAs to environments to inter-team communications – but Joyent stood by its commitments and responded to our needs every step of the way," says Loia. "They truly want to understand our business, and they're always willing to try a new approach if it looks like it will benefit both sides." workload.



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Hong Kong - Units 211 - 213, Lakeside 1, No. 8 Science Park West Avenue, Hong Kong Science Park, N.T. HK
Beijing - Units 907-908, Viva Plaza, No.29 Suzhou Street, Haidian District, Beijing, China
Shanghai - Room 9B, Zhao Feng Universe Building, No 1800 ZhongShanXiLu, Shanghai, China
Guangzhou - Room 2209, Vili International Building, 167 Lin He Xi Road, Tianhe District, Guangzhou

Tel: +852 2655 6165
Tel: +86 10 8260 8832
Tel: +86 21 6468 5018
Tel: +86 20 3867 7302

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