

# AFLAC GLOBAL INVESTMENTS MOVES CRITICAL PRODUCTION APPLICATIONS AND RECOVERY TO THE CLOUD



At one time, Aflac managed its investments with separate organizations in Japan and the US, each with their own computing infrastructures. But when the financial crisis hit, the company formed **Aflac Global Investments (AGI)** to consolidate investment management and systems into a single organization and platform.

A team from **Sungard Availability Services® (Sungard AS)** worked with Aflac Global Investments to configure and deploy a tailored cloud solution spanning two Sungard AS data centers. The infrastructure supports AGI's business-critical applications and meets stringent requirements for security, availability and disaster recovery.

## RESULTS

- Cloud assures cost-efficient IT, while tailored infrastructure and management processes support unique business requirements
- Cloud-based production applications support 24x7 global investment operations
- Aggressive recovery time objective (RTO) tested and confirmed for disaster recovery
- Security measures deployed to meet Aflac corporate guidelines
- Accelerated patching schedule for infrastructure protection

## SERVICES

### Cloud Services

- Dedicated server/storage infrastructure
- Managed Security
- Custom services for patch management

### System and Data Recovery Services

- Data Replication
- Disaster Recovery Testing



### ABOUT Aflac

Aflac Global Investments (AGI) is a division of Aflac, Inc., the largest provider of supplemental insurance in the US and of individual life insurance policies in Japan. AGI is charged with the responsible stewardship of capital held in reserve to pay future claims against policies. Those assets totaled \$129 billion in 2016 — a measure of the strength and confidence that underlies the Aflac brand.

**“Sungard AS gave us a tailor-made environment with the cost advantages of a public cloud. They customized the infrastructure and their processes to support our specific business requirements.”**

Ravi Radhakrishnan  
Director, Global Investments Technology  
Aflac, Inc.



## THE CHALLENGE



### CUSTOMIZING CLOUD

As the Aflac Global Investments (AGI) organization took shape in 2013, it was clear that the broader computing environment in Aflac — optimized to serve the needs of the insurance business — was not an ideal fit for an organization operating in a 24x7 global financial market. Aflac gave AGI the go-ahead to transition to a completely independent IT platform. It was an opportunity that's rare in any business: to start with a clean slate, unencumbered by legacy systems and capital assets, and have the freedom to select the best possible computing and service model to support the business.

AGI began building a new technology stack, integrating best-in-class commercial applications and custom-developed applications across the entire investment flow — from modeling and decision support through trading, accounting, and reporting. While building its software environment, AGI sought bids from major cloud hosting suppliers. A key requirement for vendor selection was to provide a proof-of-concept environment for testing and validating the solution against AGI's stringent requirements.

"We wanted the cost efficiencies of a public cloud, but with the added security, management support, and disaster-recovery capabilities typical of a private cloud," says Ravi Radhakrishnan, Director, Global Investments Technology.

### PASSING THE TEST

As one of four suppliers invited to respond to the bid, the Sungard AS team worked closely with AGI to understand and accommodate the custom requirements. This included hosting Aflac-owned security hardware in collocation cabinets at two Sungard AS data centers, meeting AGI's aggressive schedule for operating system and application updates and patches, and achieving an aggressive recovery time objective (RTO) should a disaster occur.

The Sungard AS team configured the proof-of-concept cloud infrastructure for AGI's production applications in one Sungard AS data center, and a recovery environment in a second Sungard AS data center. Together, AGI and Sungard AS teams tested the environment over several months, including a successful disaster recovery test that met stringent RPO and RTO requirements. AGI selected Sungard AS as its cloud and business continuity partner and moved ahead toward full deployment.

"I was impressed with Sungard AS from day one," says Radhakrishnan. "The tests went very well, better than expected. From both a disaster recovery perspective and a support perspective, Sungard AS delivered exactly what I was looking for."

### THE UNEXPECTED ARISES

The Sungard AS team designed and deployed full-scale production and recovery environments and engaged AGI stakeholders in testing and validation of the infrastructure. But just as they were preparing final tests for the disaster recovery process, the teams encountered an obstacle. With AGI hosting both its production and backup infrastructures in Sungard AS data centers, the standard process called for Sungard AS to declare a disaster and trigger recovery procedures. AGI had a business requirement to also initiate a disaster declaration, and this need led to a reengineering of the DR approach. A tailored implementation of Sungard AS Business Continuity Services (second-site recovery) now enables AGI to declare a disaster.

"It was a big hurdle, but the Sungard AS team went above and beyond to work through the issues and deploy the solution," says Radhakrishnan. "They are extremely committed and able to find a way forward. That's one of the reasons we picked Sungard AS."

## THE SOLUTION



### REDUCING CLOUD RISKS

AGI's applications run on physically partitioned server and storage hardware dedicated to AGI workloads and data, rather than on virtualized hardware shared with other cloud customers. With this approach, AGI gains the many features of a private cloud, along with the cost efficiencies found in public cloud environments.

Sungard AS designed a highly resilient environment that spans two geographically dispersed Sungard AS cloud data centers. The production environment, which can run in either data center, is backed by an identical recovery environment in the other data center. Both are kept in synch to achieve nearly active-active replication for failover. AGI also has similar computing environments in each Sungard AS data center for development and testing.

The custom configuration Sungard AS provided — with partitioned hardware platforms accessed only through AGI-managed security systems

and network gateways that don't touch the open Internet — brings great comfort to Radhakrishnan today. "Our move to the cloud is among the first for a business-critical production infrastructure in Aflac," he says. "My team worked with Sungard AS to reduce risks at every opportunity."

AGI relies on Sungard AS to patch and update its operating systems, commercial applications, and databases, ensuring that security vulnerabilities are addressed as quickly as possible. The patching schedule follows a two- or three-day SLA — faster than the standard five-day window Sungard AS provides as part of its Managed Cloud service — and custom tailored to meet AGI's strict requirements. The Sungard AS team works in concert with AGI development teams to stage and test patches before rolling them out to the production environment.

## THE BENEFITS



### A GLOBAL VIEW OF BUSINESS FROM THE CLOUD

Today, AGI's cloud environment supports about 150 primary users across AGI locations in the US and Japan, including investment professionals, as well as staff in investment administration and accounting. The applications include modeling and decision-support systems, accounting and ledger systems, along with systems that assure compliance with Aflac's corporate guidelines for investment activities.

AGI continues to enhance its software environment and refine its working relationship with Sungard AS. The business has a high degree of confidence in system availability and business continuity given all of the designed-in protections against downtime or data loss. The redundant infrastructure is proven in production, and the Sungard AS team is shifting focus to steady-state ongoing support of the environment. Regular disaster recovery testing is built into the Sungard AS service, and the

most-recent test was executed successfully to meet strict SLAs.

"Our move to the cloud was a necessary evolutionary step," says Radhakrishnan. "Working alongside Sungard AS, we learned how to move production applications to the cloud, and now know all the important details to consider. We have paved the way to do more in the cloud."

To IT managers considering a move to the cloud, Radhakrishnan offers some advice based on experience. "I think it's important to focus the project at a departmental level, so you can achieve success at a smaller scale and then build on that," he says. "And of course, you've got to be very careful with the partner you select. Having a flexible vendor is much more important than saving a few dollars."

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Ravi Radhakrishnan  
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#### About Sungard Availability Services

Sungard Availability Services provides managed IT services, information availability consulting services, business continuity management software, and disaster recovery services.

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