



Nebraskaland's name and covered wagon logo tips its hat to a simpler, rugged time a century ago when meats procured in the heartland and other rural areas of the U.S. were transported via horse and cart. That's when the Bronx, New York-based meat distributor Nebraskaland was conceived.

This privately owned family business has served the meat industry through five generations—starting in the stock yards and slaughterhouses of the Midwest and East Coast. Today, Nebraskaland is the largest distributor of boxed beef, chicken, pork, lamb, veal, variety meats and frozen and processed foods in the New York metro area.

Some things remain intact from those early days. Overnight shifts are the norm to get product into the hands of customers early the next morning. Immigrants from nearly two dozen countries work side by side. Customer service is very hands on and high touch.

But much has also changed in the course of 100 years. A fleet of refrigerated big rigs has replaced horse and wagon delivery. Orders are fulfilled at a modern, state-of-the-art warehouse. And technology now drives the entire operation.

mindSHIFT Delivers Prime Grade IBM i Hosted IT Infrastructure and Cloud Services to East Coast Meat Distributor

Challenge

For quite a while, Nebraskaland was serving a dual role of distributing meats and managing its own IT infrastructure on premises. But as capital expenses grew and technology became more sophisticated, Nebraskaland decided it was time to transition the company from its in-house IT operation.

Nebraskaland was in a situation common for many companies today. The costs of managing, maintaining and supporting its own IT infrastructure heavily outweighed the benefits. A third-party IT provider could improve efficiency, decrease costs and remove risk. The company just had to find the right partner.

Nebraskaland had a server room in its Bronx facility equipped with an IBM® iSeries® production system and four full-time IT staff making sure all the hardware and software was up and running. But production boxes are expensive—running anywhere from \$200,000 to \$250,000 in equipment lease costs—plus the expense of internal IT salaries.

Then there were the critical overnight hours in the warehouse when orders were selected and loaded on trucks for morning delivery from their Bronx, New York facility. Approximately 50 Nebraskaland warehouse employees used radio-controlled, wireless devices to select and load the orders from the cooler and freezer each night. They received orders via headphones and use hand-held scanners to confirm that they were picking the correct product. If any of these systems go down, they need immediate support.

"Selecting orders in the middle of the night is a critical time for us. If a printer loses connection, a queue jams or some other obstacle occurs that the warehouse management is not familiar with how to fix, we will have a production delay," said Dan Romanoff, executive vice president of Nebraskaland. "We'd have to wake up our IT department to come in or give instructions over the phone to get things moving again. In either case, there would be delays that impact our business."

Additionally, the Nebraskaland IT staff maintained all the desktop computers throughout the organization. "We had outgrown our internal IT capabilities. We chose to move into the cloud and find a third-party provider to manage these services for us to make our systems and processes more efficient," said Romanoff.

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Executive Vice President
Nebraskaland
Bronx, New York

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Nebraskaland conducted a search and selected a small New Jersey IT company for its initial foray into outsourced IT services. They moved Nebraskaland's iSeries production box (that was still under lease) to a New Jersey facility and took over day-to-day IT services. However, it became evident that the provider wasn't equipped to provide the seamless support and dedicated resources that complex IBM i systems require, and that Nebraskaland expected.

"This was a step in the right direction, but the provider was just too small," said Romanoff. "There was a limited number of people we could count on in their company. If we needed help in the middle of the night, there was a short list of contacts to call. If we couldn't reach them, we were left to fix it ourselves."

Solution

As Nebraskaland searched for a new IT partner, one name emerged from the pack—mindSHIFT, one of the largest IT services providers in the U.S.

With two years remaining on its iSeries production box lease, Nebraskaland reached out to mindSHIFT to learn more about their IBM i managed services. When that lease expired, Nebraskaland chose to migrate everything to the cloud.

"We wanted to eliminate our server room and all of the hardware costs," said Romanoff. "mindSHIFT seemed like the right partner to help us do that."

mindSHIFT created a roll swap plan to replicate the production box in New Jersey and eventually move it to mindSHIFT's Commack, New York data center. Nebraskaland could test the operations model until its lease expired and gain comfort in the partnership. If all went as planned, mindSHIFT would then replicate the Commack production box to a high availability IBM Power7 solution in the mindSHIFT Minnesota data center for disaster recovery. This plan was successful and Nebraskaland ended up with a fully managed, cloud-based IT services model for their IBM i system.

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With the plan in place, mindSHIFT took over complete responsibility for Nebraskaland's IT infrastructure, from hardware to networking to wireless access in the company's warehouse. mindSHIFT provides on-premises support, manages and hosts the IBM Power6 production system and Power7 backup box and provides desktop support for the entire operation.

Recently, when some of the orders weren't coming through on the warehouse's voice picking system in the middle of the night, Nebraskaland contacted the mindSHIFT help desk. Since the issue couldn't be resolved remotely and immediately, two mindSHIFT technicians rushed to the warehouse to get the system back online.

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Results

After two years of testing, Nebraskaland is now operating fully in the cloud and has an ongoing managed IT services partnership with mindSHIFT. Its on-premises production box is gone and only three servers remain on-site for cameras and various other non mission-critical functions. All mission-critical servers have been shifted to mindSHIFT data centers, and Nebraskaland now has a rock-solid disaster recovery solution via the mindSHIFT data center in Minnesota.

High Availability, Defined Costs

Disaster recovery and high availability was something Nebraskaland definitely needed. It replicates the box located in Commack in real time and if something happens to the company's system there, the Minnesota box assumes the roles and responsibilities of the Commack box almost instantaneously.

"We went from having no backup to a vastly improved program that is very reliable and efficient," said Romanoff. "We eliminated our server room and all hardware costs—and I have one defined monthly cost for managed services with mindSHIFT."

Complete IT Coverage, Ongoing Dialog

Nebraskaland has most, if not all, of its IT infrastructure in place with mindSHIFT. Going forward, they may look to mindSHIFT for guidance on an additional server to handle internal IT projects within their operations department.

Every month, mindSHIFT technicians meet at Nebraskaland to go over routine open items and discuss any issues with the company's controller and CFO. During these visits, mindSHIFT staff talks with employees to see if any problems exist, and performs maintenance and updates to ensure that everything is working the way it should.

Improved Infrastructure, Seamless Operation

The benefits of having an efficient, reliable IT infrastructure extend beyond mere hardware. The systems work seamlessly, and many of Nebraskaland's employees are probably unaware that they are now doing business through the cloud.

"Our mobile proof-of-delivery is a big advantage for us," said Romanoff. "Our IT infrastructure gives us so many benefits, from helping us deliver a high quality product to controlling output and coordinating the time we deliver—and how fast we deliver—our products."

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Find out what we can do for you.

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