Who is WWK?

WWK Lebensversicherung a.G. (WWK) has been providing German consumers and businesses with market-leading life insurance services for over 135 years. Now, as an independent and modern financial services provider, WWK has 1.3 million customers, 10,000 partners, and has received numerous awards for its service portfolio and approach to customer service.

“Our commitment is to develop services that make a real difference to the lives of our customers. Being able to innovate at speed and scale is critical in keeping this promise.” Manfred Huber, Head of Server and Storage Services, WWK
WWK is a forward-thinking, innovative provider of financial services with an ongoing mission to provide customers with the best, most engaging services and experiences. As part of this commitment, the “Server & Storage Services” team\(^1\) at WWK, headed by Manfred Huber, had been experimenting with both proprietary and open source platforms for decades. Historically, WWK ran its core insurance services on popular but monolithic technologies which suited the development team for many years. As WWK’s customer-base grew, however, the team identified the need for a faster, leaner more flexible infrastructure to hasten innovation, improve security and reduce overheads.

Manfred and his team became interested in containerization to streamline WWK’s infrastructure and provide a flexible framework in which to accelerate innovation. WWK’s existing platform was expensive to run and had many limitations. Containers promised the ability to develop, test, deploy and redeploy applications in multiple environments - at a fraction of the cost, and double the development velocity.

“lifestream represents a major step forward in the way we conduct business; managing all functions. Such mission-critical architecture needed to be managed within an agile, secure and scalable platform - Rancher has proven to be the right choice.” Michael Maier, Container Project Leader, WWK

\(^1\) WWK’s Container Project Team responsible for the success of the project are (shown) Manfred Huber, WWK; Christian Reuß, WWK; Michael Maier, WWK; Tolga Erdem, Rancher; Dominik Zach, WWK; Robert Ullrich, WWK; Ulrich Keller, WWK; Ronny Walter, WWK and (not shown): Michael Schulz, WWK; Marcelo Castro, intersoft; Alexander Dvornichenko, intersoft; Frank Grzesiak-Mau, intersoft
After a pilot project testing K8s and Docker, WWK developed and deployed its core insurance platform ‘lifestream’ using a modern, containerized architecture. lifestream is developed by WWK subsidiary, Intersoft, in Hamburg. The lifestream platform manages WWK’s entire insurance service - from brokering consumer quotes to managing major corporate insurance portfolios. WWK ran two proofs of concept (PoCs) over a six-month period (one at WWK and one at Intersoft). For the first five months they ran lifestream on an alternative container platform. Then, after reviewing Forrester’s report, WWK conducted a four-week PoC using Rancher, which ran from mid December 2018 until January 2019.

Rancher met all requirements identified as ‘showstoppers’ in the PoC as well as achieving a number of milestones and points across a list of weighted requirements. These requirements were grouped into three areas; operating the Kubernetes management platform; operating the Kubernetes clusters; and operating lifestream in the Kubernetes cluster.

In February 2019 WWK started a Project “WWKgoesContainer” with the aim to build a Rancher Environment for the Test Department in just three months. At this point Michael Maier took over as Container Project Leader.
Security and Compliance

WWK, as a German financial institution, is certified by Bundesamt für Sicherheit in der Informationstechnik (BSI) and is, therefore, subject to stringent governance and compliance regulations. According to these compliance regulations, WWK opted to patch its previous environment quarterly. With over 200 instances, this equated to 200 days of manned support. In addition, the development department is also involved in this work; incurring further expenses.

Radically Simplify Testing

With new service development and platform management comes the need for testing. Whilst a necessary process, is it not what motivates development teams, who would rather be working on new projects. Using containerized applications means that testing is radically simplified; developers only need to make one, easily replaceable image.

In more traditional, proprietary environments applications may be more monolithic; only subject to three to five releases each year. In a containerized environment, Michael and his project team were able to double the number of releases - three to five releases grew to 10 to 12 per year. What this has resulted in is a dramatic decrease in the time it takes to test; from 15 - 16 weeks per year to just four weeks – a 75 percent reduction.

Freedom and Flexibility

WWK needed a solution that would reduce expenditure, allowing ongoing flexibility and provide a platform for long-term growth. Looking at alternatives, significant additional investment would have been required, plus this approach would limit WWK to a single vendor ecosystem. Rancher allows the freedom to work with any third-party solutions, easily integrated into one Rancher platform.

The project team also saw significant economies in discovery phase. Rather than setting up the four environments needed in the earlier PoC, with Rancher, just two were required - one for administration and testing; one for development, UAT and production.
Attracting Talent

Attracting the best talent is difficult and costly. Quality developers prefer to work with the most disruptive technologies, rather than outdated legacy systems. By transforming its development infrastructure, WWK could position itself as an ideal employer for talented developers. Especially those looking to immerse themselves in container technologies, in a fast-moving, agile environment. Working with Rancher frees WWK’s developers from mundane patching and testing, allowing them to focus on the areas that interest them most.

“We operate in a highly competitive marketplace, so we’re focused on making WWK a rewarding place to work. By bringing the most advanced and interesting technology into our business, we can attract the best talent from around the world.” Michael Maier, Container Project Leader, WWK
WWK was under pressure to deploy its new platform and make progress on a host of new initiatives. Consequently, a key motivation for working with Rancher was the speed the team could pick up the project and complete the PoC successfully. The Rancher team were able to capitalise on much of the groundwork completed in the initial six-month PoC and proved Rancher in just four weeks.

Naturally, cost was deciding factor, too. Major industry developments have shifted pricing structures around several popular solutions. Added to this, variations in pricing according to version, accumulate cost automatically. There’s only one version of Rancher, which is free and available to everyone. Whereas many alternatives are free for basic functionality but levy a heavy fee to access more heavy-lifting features.

“Rancher make us feel our business is as important to them as it is to us. This level of commitment and care is difficult to find; Rancher’s support team has become an extended part of our team here at WWK” - Michael Maier, Container Project Leader, WWK

More importantly, for WWK, the team at Rancher has become an extension of its own, in the same way the platform has integrated seamlessly with its operational infrastructure. This was a crucial factor for the WWK team, who had worked with many technology partners before. They were looking for a strategic partner that would make their business a priority. Rancher’s leadership team, working alongside its engineers and project managers, have been involved at every stage.
How did they plan their migration to Rancher?

Journey

1. Initial six-month PoC was undertaken between June and end November 2018
2. The Rancher PoC was successfully completed in January 2019 after just four weeks
3. WWK finished lifestream for the Test department in May 2019
4. This is only the beginning. In July 2019, WWK plans to further expand the use of the Rancher platform

What have been the benefits?

Benefits

• 75 percent reduction in manned support when using containers
• Only one update cycle; compliant with BSI regulations, this has dramatically reduced man-hours
• 75 percent reduction in testing time; dramatic decrease in the time it takes to test; from 15 - 16 weeks per year to just four weeks
• Economies in discovery phase; only two environments needed compared to four in a traditional environment
• New projects launched more quickly
• Customer base growing and innovation hastening

For more information about WWK or other public reference customers in production with Rancher, please contact us at sales@rancher.com.