



BlackLine: Journey to the Cloud

High-Stakes Financials

The financial close process can provide vital information about a business's financial health and integrity. Generating that information often requires painstaking attention to detail. It is typically a manual process that involves hundreds—sometimes thousands—of Excel spreadsheets. It's also fraught with risk for companies that must comply with stringent financial regulations. One misstep could have severe legal repercussions, not to mention a damaging impact on a company's reputation.

BlackLine is the first and leading provider of applications that automate and control the entire financial close process, as well as a host of other key processes. With BlackLine, midsize businesses and large enterprises alike can transform their existing finance and accounting departments into leading-edge, modern finance organizations.

BlackLine's platform enables companies to import and reconcile millions of records in minutes—a process that once would have taken hundreds of people days to accomplish. The resulting return on investment for customers has helped BlackLine grow by at least 50% annually since the company's inception.

"As CTO, I have to look ahead and have the infrastructure in place to support growth two or three years from now," explains Alain Avakian, CTO at BlackLine. "We have been able to grow quickly because of relationships with cloud leaders like Verizon and NetApp."

One Step at a Time

BlackLine began its journey to the cloud with a managed hosting environment, which at first helped the company grow quickly. But nonstop growth coupled with seasonal load bursts put increasing strain on BlackLine's systems. During monthly, quarterly, and annual closing periods, peak loads could reach up to 20 times the baseline load. Maintaining availability during these periods was critical. Downtime was simply not an option.

"In the software-as-a-service business, the service is as important as the software. If we cannot keep the service running, we don't have software," explains Darren Gasser, director of engineering at BlackLine.

BlackLine customers range from medium-sized businesses to Fortune 50 companies, including Verizon. Regardless of their business's size, BlackLine's customers have the highest expectations for control over their financial data. They demand 24/7 availability, rock-solid security, and strict compliance with financial standards. "Our customers are sending terabytes of financial data beyond their corporate firewalls, which is a sensitive thing to do," explains Gasser. "They want to make sure that our controls are as good as, or better than, theirs."

Taking Control

Colocation provided that control. With colocation, BlackLine could retain the flexibility of a cloud environment with the capability to quickly provision new servers, change networks, or add storage. To architect its colocation environment, BlackLine searched for best-in-class suppliers that its customers could trust.

Teaming for Success

NetApp, the company's long-time storage provider, offered proven technologies with the engineering expertise to design and build a platform tailored to BlackLine's needs for performance, availability, and security.

"NetApp really stood apart from other vendors with the team they brought in to look at our needs," explains Gasser. "They brought in new technologies that allowed us to design a next-generation data center without simply adding more disks."



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Alain Avakian, CTO, BlackLine

Verizon was a clear choice for colocation. Among the top cloud providers in the world, the company has a reputation backed by tier 3 and 4 data centers purpose-built for security compliance. “The fact that Verizon’s facilities are built for government-grade security was very appealing to us,” explains Avakian. “Security is paramount for an organization like ours that hosts financial data from some of the world’s largest companies.”

Embracing the Hybrid Cloud

Together, NetApp and Verizon teamed with BlackLine to architect a colocation-to-hybrid-cloud environment for off-site backup and disaster recovery.

In the new colocation environment, BlackLine’s engineers were able to transform their IT operations from a cost center to a business growth enabler. They can now adjust hardware and software to meet customers’ needs on demand while maintaining the availability and service levels that customers have come to expect.

“Moving to colocation was a very strategic and important step for us,” explains Avakian. “With Verizon, we have the network speed and reliability we need to consistently deliver on our promise to customers. With direct control over our NetApp storage, we can double our infrastructure at a moment’s notice and provision new services in minutes—not days.”

By leveraging Verizon’s Virtual Disaster Recovery (VDR) service, BlackLine can now also meet internal recovery time and recovery point objectives of one hour and offer a two-hour service-level agreement for full recovery. It can do this without having to carry the capital costs of building and managing a second data center.

“In the financial world, security and compliance are a lot of work for small and midsize companies,” says Jeff Nord, vice president of service delivery at Verizon. “Being able to hand that over to Verizon has freed BlackLine to concentrate on what’s important for them, which is meeting customer requirements.”

Flexibility for the Future

With a hybrid cloud environment that leverages Verizon’s cloud-based VDR services and a Data Fabric enabled by NetApp, BlackLine has seamless control of its data in and out of the cloud. As BlackLine evolves its offerings to provide greater value to its customers, it has access to Verizon’s portfolio of cloud services based on NetApp—all connected with a data fabric leveraging the NetApp® Data ONTAP® operating system.

“Our engineers just love it,” explains Gasser. “As they come up with new products and features, and as our customers continue to find new ways to use our software, we can bring in a wide variety of resources to adapt to that changing environment.”

Verizon and NetApp: Data Resiliency in the Hybrid Cloud

No two companies are exactly alike, and neither are their ideal cloud solutions. To provide the hybrid cloud offerings that today’s enterprises need, Verizon teamed with NetApp to build a broad portfolio of cloud services that offer the highest levels of data resiliency in the hybrid cloud.

“You can outsource almost everything except for control of your data,” says Nord. “That’s why customers choose Verizon and NetApp.”

With NetApp and Verizon cloud services, customers get the control, security, and performance of private cloud resources in an opex-based elastic compute tier that can scale up or down on demand. They also gain from working with two industry leaders mutually dedicated to their success.

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About BlackLine

BlackLine is the first and most experienced provider of enterprise-class software designed to automate and control the entire financial close process. With BlackLine, midsize businesses and large enterprises alike can transform their existing finance and accounting departments into leading-edge, modern finance organizations. Headquartered in Los Angeles, with offices in many U.S. locations, as well as London and Sydney, BlackLine’s seasoned professionals possess extensive experience in technology and accounting.

About Verizon

Verizon is a global leader delivering innovative communications and technology solutions that improve the way its customers live, work, and play. Verizon Enterprise Solutions is a leading provider of advanced IT and communications services to enterprises and governments around the world.

About NetApp

Leading organizations worldwide count on NetApp for software, systems and services to manage and store their data. Customers value NetApp teamwork, expertise, and passion for helping them succeed now and into the future.