

Elixir software: building a better future with AWS and Zen

Case Study





Formed in 2012 and consisting of approximately 20 employees, Elixir Software is helping to power the worldwide pharmaceutical industry as it develops lifesaving drugs and vaccines.

With a worldwide client base and a critical requirement for tight security, Elixir found the perfect balance with AWS and Zen.





② The challenge

With customers largely consisting of international pharmaceutical businesses, Elixir provides a vital cog in the wheel when it comes to the development of drugs and medicines.

And with that comes a client base that requires a consistently excellent and secure service.

“We produce the software”, says Elixir Senior Cloud Architect Ray Tran. “In a way we’re the ‘Microsoft Office’ of this space, which can be stressful because even though we’re quite small, our

customers think they’re talking to a massive international supplier.” That expectation from a demanding customer base is what made Elixir choose AWS and, ultimately, Zen.

② The solution

That demand for rock-solid security was one of the main motivators in Elixir's decision to choose AWS as a cloud infrastructure provider.

It's a partnership that has existed since 2016, but one that has often been difficult to see the benefits of.

"We spent nearly two years trying to work out how to get onto the AWS Well-Architected Framework", says Ray. "That was very difficult to do when dealing directly with AWS. They're huge and they're continually evolving. In fact, things change so quickly in AWS that it can be a struggle to get the right information.

It was impossible for us to keep up with that rapid rate of change. They pointed us to Zen and advised that we talk to them. As a Zen customer at home, I was already aware of and happy with their service, which was a big influence on our decision to partner with Zen."

Choosing a Managed Service from Zen meant a huge amount of the heavy lifting was taken from Elixir's shoulders. "They used to call it 'undifferentiated heavy lifting'", Ray comments:

"That's one of the ways in which Zen have really helped. I can manage the architecture and do the designs, but there's a lot of heavy lifting that we can leave to Zen. Things like billing and any support that we need help with."

"There's a lot of heavy lifting that we can leave to Zen."



② The benefits

The benefits of using Zen to provide an AWS service are multiple for Elixir.

“Working with Zen gives us a much better route to the information and tools we need”, says Ray. “But in addition to their working relationship with AWS, Zen also have their own skilled people. Often we can ask a question and someone at Zen will answer, which means many of our queries don’t even have to go to AWS. AWS is a vast, unexplored space, and it’s great to have a partner that can help you navigate that journey.”

As well as the improved speed and efficiency of

managing their AWS service, the partnership has also been fruitful in terms of Elixir’s security demands.

“We’re looking to obtain more security accreditations. We want to provide our customers with the assurance they’re looking for. Zen have helped us through this process, and it’s been nice to be able to use their resource to help us along.”

That Zen resource included a Zen-conducted AWS Well-Architected Review.

“The main benefit of the Well-Architected Review is helping us to focus on what’s important. It has helped us to identify things that we weren’t doing quite right and isolate areas for improvement. For example, security and cost are important pillars to us, and within those pillars are topics that are even more relevant. The Well-Architected Framework has allowed us to break down a huge task into manageable chunks, whereas before we found the whole thing a little overwhelming.”

And that quest for improved security is greatly enhanced by AWS.

“When we get a customer in Japan, for example, we deploy into an AWS region in or near Japan. When we get one in

Boston, where a lot of our customers are, we deploy into US East 1. Each customer gets a VPC (Virtual Private Cloud) with their own components and no overlap apart from the fact that it’s all Amazon.”

Not only is this a great boon in terms of security, but it also makes a technically difficult process relatively simple.

“The technicalities are almost irrelevant”, says Ray. “When you go to the supermarket you don’t care about how the stuff gets there, you just want to go down the aisles and pick up your shopping. That’s what it’s like with Zen and AWS for us. The experience of going through the door with AWS was hard work, but with Zen it’s just more straightforward.”

And of the relationship with Zen? “When we interact with Zen”, adds Ray, “it’s always positive. They are knowledgeable and respond immediately which is really good. It’s so much easier to get in touch with and talk to Zen than it was with AWS. I have a single point of contact and I know what he looks like. We can have an actual conversation, and because he’s only about 30 miles away I can even pop in and have a beer!”

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We're in business to be a force for good

Get in touch today to find out more
and start your journey with Zen

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