IT innovator boosts enterprise cloud adoption and revenue opportunities by housing its latest lab within Equinix

"We put our AHEAD Lab's physical infrastructure inside Equinix because we can just do more there. Equinix provides a bridge from the traditional data center world to the brave new frontier of public cloud."

—Brett Foy, VP of Engineering, AHEAD

Executive overview

Leading provider of enterprise cloud solutions, AHEAD, helps its clients increase their digital transformation success by demonstrating how to adopt new technologies and ways of running IT that add greater value to digital businesses. The Chicago-based AHEAD Lab gives enterprise-scale clients a vendor-independent space to explore new technologies and providers, interact with AHEAD experts and devise innovative business strategies for developing an "enterprise cloud delivery framework" with total confidence.

By moving the lab's core infrastructure inside Equinix, AHEAD was freed from worrying about data center operations and could focus solely on enhancing the lab's capabilities for developing and demonstrating enterprise cloud solutions. With a robust physical colocation and interconnection platform, Equinix optimized the lab's effectiveness by enabling AHEAD to reliably showcase technologies and solutions, and bring them together in ways that simply weren't previously possible.

Business challenge

It's rapidly becoming a cloud-first world, but many enterprises are still learning how to best integrate cloud and new technologies into existing IT infrastructures. AHEAD fills this gap by developing purpose-built, customized cloud solutions that help its enterprise clients maximize their full potential. The company aims to simplify IT for its clients, so that operations remain cost-efficient, secure and flexible as enterprise cloud requirements evolve.

Customer Profile

History
AHEAD was founded in 2007 by Daniel Adamany, Founder and CEO. Daniel started AHEAD with the goal of creating a company that could provide true, comprehensive technology solutions to enterprise clients.

Customers
AHEAD transforms how and where enterprises run applications and infrastructure. From strategic consulting to implementation and managed services, AHEAD creates tailored solutions at all stages of the enterprise cloud journey.

Headquarters
Chicago, IL

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A key focus for AHEAD is demonstrating to its customers how to maximize the value of public cloud by building a durable cloud delivery framework. The AHEAD lab offers a vendor-independent IT environment to create and run enterprise-scale proofs of concept (POCs). In addition, it provides a "sandbox" where clients and AHEAD experts can weave together technologies and test and score a solution's performance, capacity and efficiency.

When the company recently moved office locations, it needed new facilities that:

- Met its data center and interconnection requirements

- Had the capacity to scale to support all the lab's equipment and capabilities

- Provided direct access to multiple technology solutions, cloud and IT vendors, and enterprises, enabling AHEAD to support POCs for its growing client base

AHEAD selected the Equinix industry-leading data center and interconnection platform to realize its mission of demonstrating its expertise as a cloud/IT solutions provider.

Solution

AHEAD's client base is primarily in the Midwest, so it chose an Equinix International Business Exchange™ (IBX®) data center in Chicago to house its lab to access as many enterprises in as many industries as possible. It also wanted the capability to remotely access the lab from any of its briefing centers or take clients directly to the lab facility.

AHEAD partnered with Equinix to gain the required IT and cloud infrastructure capabilities for its lab, in addition to being in the same facility as the key partners it demonstrates with in its customers' POCs. AHEAD leverages partnerships with more than 75 different technology and cloud vendors, including Amazon Web Services (AWS), Microsoft Azure, Cisco, Dell/EMC, ServiceNow and VMware. Since Equinix maintained a close relationship with many of these vendors, it became a key reason for AHEAD to establish the partnership, in addition to its ability to directly and securely interconnect the company's clients between traditional data center and multicloud infrastructures.

The lab's interconnection infrastructure leverages an Interconnection Oriented Architecture™ (IOA™) strategy, deployed on Platform Equinix™, using the Performance Hub™ and Equinix Cloud Exchange™ to establish interconnection hubs. These hubs provide the enhanced application and cloud performance and scalability required for AHEAD to support up to 600 clients annually, across a portfolio of more than 50 enterprise cloud topics. Everything from evaluating data center operation "lift and shift" to the cloud to next-generation, event-driven application and security development in the cloud can be explored. In addition, by harnessing Equinix capabilities in network aggregation and direct interconnection with the public cloud, AHEAD can show its clients how to build better corporate security and governance models, and extend network virtualization into the cloud or the data center.

Finally, Equinix IBX data centers have a reputation for quality and unmatched reliability. With a 99.9999% global uptime record, Equinix is also more than capable of supporting the power and cooling needs of the AHEAD lab, along with any of the lab's other infrastructure demands.

"Choosing Equinix for our Cloud Innovation Lab allowed us to demonstrate the art of the possible to our potential customers."
— Brett Foy, VP of Engineering, AHEAD

Business results

- Supports multiple technology/cloud POCs for its growing 600+ clients on a scalable data center and interconnection platform

- Enables fast enterprise cloud solution POC deployments, with instant interconnection to multiple network and public cloud providers

- Increases vendor-independent IT/cloud validations via proximity to a rich partner ecosystem

- Frees lab personnel to create value-added capabilities and innovative solutions rather than running data center operations

Value realized

Moving the lab's core infrastructure inside the Equinix Chicago IBX data center instantly gave AHEAD the exact operational and interconnection capabilities it needed. Equinix did the "heavy lifting" (according to AHEAD VP of Engineering, Brett Foy), giving his lab staff more time to enhance its solution development, testing and POC demonstrations.

"From a physical infrastructure perspective, Equinix gives us the ability to do more than we would have been able to do on our own. It expands the number of technologies we can showcase and integrate into enterprise solutions," reported Foy.

Equinix helped AHEAD

- Build a high-performance, enterprise-class lab for faster, custom cloud solution development and speed-to-deployment for client POC testing

- Gain faster access to technology partners and network and cloud service providers through high-performance, direct and secure interconnection solutions—via Equinix Performance Hub and Equinix Cloud Exchange—to seamlessly bridge existing IT and public cloud/multicloud platforms

- Strengthen go-to-market technology partnerships by accelerating cloud solution development and time to market

- Access necessary core data center IT operational capabilities, including sufficient power and cooling resources, and leverage a robust and reliable physical infrastructure

- Eliminate the daily lab staff operational responsibilities to focus on creating value-added technology evaluation and innovation capabilities

Most importantly, housing the lab in Equinix helps AHEAD make more data-driven, value-added recommendations to its clients and offer them innovative solutions that prepare them to move ahead confidently toward transformative cloud strategies for their businesses. Partnering with Equinix to demonstrate the cloud's technical capabilities, economic differences, and multicloud access opens a broader path toward greater innovation and revenue growth for both AHEAD and its customers.

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