

Leading European Financial Services Group is Standardizing and Automating its Data Centers with Cisco ACI and Red Hat Ansible

Size: 138,000 employees · Industry: Financial Services · Location: Paris, France

Societe Generale is one of the leading European financial services groups with 138,000 members of staff in 62 countries. It supports 29 million individual clients, businesses, and institutional investors around the world by offering a wide range of advisory services and tailored financial solutions. For more information, visit societegenerale.com.



Challenges

- Increase data center agility and automation
- Implement DevOps-style “network as code” philosophy
- Streamline global IT operations

Solutions

- Cisco® Application Centric Infrastructure (Cisco ACI™)
- Cisco Nexus® 9000 Series switches
- Cisco Customer Experience (Cisco CX)
- Red Hat Ansible
- GitHub

Results

- Accelerated infrastructure deployments and maintenance
- Standardized network infrastructure and policies across multiple data centers
- Increased operational efficiency and business agility on a global scale

For more information

- [Cisco ACI](#)
- [Cisco Nexus 9000](#)
- [Cisco CX](#)
- [Red Hat Ansible](#)
- [GitHub](#)

Challenge: Increase data center agility, automation

Innovation and digital transformation are strategic priorities that have enabled Societe Generale to continuously enhance its client services and support the economy. These efforts were boosted by a data center transformation three years ago, helping spur DevOps-driven software development, container-based application delivery, and the business agility that comes with them. But as Societe Generale's computing and development capabilities vaulted forward, the limitations of its legacy network became increasingly apparent.

"We needed our infrastructure to catch up to compute in terms of agility," says Thomas Mouilleseaux, global head of network architecture, security, reliability, and automation at Societe Generale, "so we introduced DevOps principles to the data center networking team."

This "network as code" philosophy and a desire to deliver Infrastructure-as-a-Service led the company to Cisco ACI, the industry's leading software-defined networking solution. With the help of the Cisco Customer Experience (Cisco CX) team, Societe Generale deployed Cisco ACI in its UK data center and later connected multiple data centers in France using a Cisco ACI Multi-Site design. The financial services company is now in the process of extending the network architecture to its regional data centers in the Czech Republic and the United States.

"Cisco ACI is supporting roughly 1000 leaves on a number of large underlay fabrics, and all of the policies are consistent," says Vivien Strady, global head of data center and network at Societe Generale, noting the fabrics host physical server, private cloud, and big data environments. "That type of standardization and software-defined automation is important for operational efficiency, knowledge sharing, and business agility—on a global scale."



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Global Head of Data Center and Network, Societe Generale



Leveraging Cisco ACI integrations for automation and monitoring

Programmability and automation were key factors in the decision to deploy the network architecture, as were the solution integrations offered by Cisco ACI ecosystem partners.

“We started with automation from day zero,” Mouilleseaux says. “We didn’t want to go the traditional route and then have to redo everything again, so we put all of the configurations through our automation engine.”

That engine is Red Hat Ansible, with Ansible Core modules, Ansible AWX orchestration, GitHub Version Control, and Cisco ACI Ansible playbooks automating the connectivity, configuration, and security of Societe Generale’s network fabrics around the world.

“It used to take us days to get a switch configured and months to do a data center software upgrade,” Mouilleseaux recalls. “With Cisco ACI and our enhanced Ansible playbooks, we are able to achieve zero-touch provisioning for switches, and data center software upgrades only take weeks. That’s an incredible gain of speed and agility.”

Societe Generale is leveraging Cisco Network Insights Base, Cisco StateChangeChecker, and Cisco EnhancedEndpointTracker—which can be downloaded from the Cisco ACI App Center—for additional network visibility. And it is using the Cisco ACI App for Splunk Enterprise to continuously monitor the health of its network fabrics.

“These are great integrations that help us automate, monitor, and continuously improve our network fabrics,” Mouilleseaux says. “We’re also looking at additional integrations that will help us with firewall orchestration, load balancing, compute, overlay networking, and containers.”

Getting support from Cisco CX

From the initial stages of architecture and playbook design to the implementation and integration of its Cisco ACI network to ongoing automation and efficiency improvements, Cisco CX has been intimately involved.

“From the very beginning, Cisco has helped us come together and work as one team,” Mouilleseaux says. “Our collaboration with Cisco CX and Cisco’s Data Center Business Unit spurred the co-development of the Cisco ACI Multi-Site Orchestrator and the creation of our own Centers of Expertise in Paris and Bangalore.”

The partnership has also helped streamline design configurations, onboard compute technologies, and deploy key features.

“We’re considering using Cisco ACI Remote Leaf for our smaller sites and we may eventually connect all of our data centers around the world,” Mouilleseaux says. “There’s a lot of opportunity to extend the strong foundation we have built.”

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