

Salling Group speeds time to market for capacity amid retail surges

salling group

Software and services

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Denmark’s largest retail group, Salling Group, is focused on providing the best shopping experience for its brands’ customers, whether in its stores or online. While the community version of the Kubernetes distribution that powers Red Hat OpenShift had provided a solid platform for around 70 business-critical applications, its lack of stability and elasticity when running on-premises meant Salling Group could not expand its use. Migrating to Red Hat OpenShift on Google Cloud has brought resilience and scalability, improved operational efficiency, and reduced time-to-market for new nodes and new clusters.



Retail

1,700+ stores

61,000+ employees

Benefits

- ▶ Improved resilience, eliminating downtime on Black Friday
- ▶ Freed up five person-days per quarter
- ▶ Reduced time-to-market for new nodes and new clusters
- ▶ Made access to support and guidance easy

“With Red Hat OpenShift 4 on Google Cloud, we now have a stable environment that we spend almost zero time maintaining.”

Shrutimitranand Chaturvedi
Lead Engineer, Salling Group

“Red Hat has been the trusted centerpiece in our transformation to a composable IT architecture.”

Steen Kronborg

Chief Enterprise Architect, Salling Group

Adapting over the decades to evolving shopping habits

With a history that spans more than 110 years, Salling Group, Denmark’s largest retail group, serves 11 million customers weekly. Its brands have evolved over the decades to support new shopping habits and lifestyle changes; they include føtex, Bilka, and Netto. The group’s focus today continues to be on providing the best shopping experience for its brands’ customers, whether in its stores or online.

Upstream OKD—the community version of the Kubernetes distribution that powers Red Hat OpenShift—had provided a solid platform for the group’s front- and back-end systems for many years. While a partner provided the on-premises container platform, which hosted all customizations and add-ons to Salling Group’s e-commerce platform. The 70 or so business-critical applications running on the platform also include web shops, the entire purchase workflow for those shops and telephone purchases, and m-commerce applications.

“Our management liked OKD and wanted to use it more,” said Shrutimitranand Chaturvedi, Lead Engineer at Salling Group. Future plans included new mobile apps and additional campaigns and offerings for Black Friday. But a lack of elasticity had impacted web shops’ profits during peak periods such as Black Friday. “Our on-premise OKD wasn’t very dynamic. We couldn’t scale rapidly during peak periods. We needed to plan months in advance whenever we needed to scale it up,” said Chaturvedi.

Moreover, Salling Group had experienced many issues with on-premises OKD: “The platform had been unavailable for hours at a time on several occasions, causing an unpleasant situation with our retailers,” said Chaturvedi; a web shop being down could mean lost revenues for a retailer. “Loads were always heavy on weekends and, because of that, we always had issues when we returned to work on a Monday morning. We had a name for it—Disaster Monday. OKD running on-premises was not very stable.”

Adopting an enterprise-level platform in a dynamic cloud

Looking for a more robust and flexible environment, Salling Group decided to adopt an enterprise-level Kubernetes platform and move to the cloud. With OKD being the community version of Red Hat OpenShift, the group chose to migrate from OKD 3 to Red Hat OpenShift 4. And after testing several cloud environments, it selected Google Cloud. “Management didn’t want to move away from the Kubernetes distribution in OKD and liked the dynamic nature of Google Cloud,” said Chaturvedi. “They also liked that Red Hat OpenShift bundles many useful tools out of the box, including auto-scaling and self-healing.”

With Salling Group one of the pioneers for running Red Hat OpenShift on Google Cloud, Chaturvedi and his team worked closely with both Google and Red Hat experts to set up the environment to meet the group’s specific needs. It also engaged professional support from pre-sales solution architects for extra confidence during the migration. “We need a shared virtual private cloud (VCP) in Google Cloud so our network and security teams can manage their responsibilities separately,” said Chaturvedi. “We worked with Red Hat and Google experts to figure out how to achieve the setup we needed.”

Chaturvedi and his team migrated the first set of applications—four customer support applications—in just a month. With the customer support applications public-facing, Google Cloud features ensure the network is secured with appropriate firewall rules put in place.

Enjoying peace of mind with a highly resilient and dynamic platform

Eliminated downtime during critical peak periods

Migrating to Red Hat OpenShift on Google Cloud has significantly improved resilience for Salling Group. “Our environment is more stable with Red Hat OpenShift on Google Cloud,” said Chaturvedi. He shared the example of a typical Black Friday—one of the year’s biggest events when traffic can increase up to 20-fold. Thanks to Red Hat OpenShift, the big gathering with 20 people staying up all night in the office to keep applications running is a thing of the past.

“Previously, we always had issues on Black Friday,” said Chaturvedi. “But since adopting Red Hat OpenShift, the event has passed almost unnoticed for my team.” He revealed how on the first Black Friday after migrating to Red Hat OpenShift on Google Cloud, his team gathered in the office just like they always had in the past. But with no issues to fix, they got bored, enjoyed a nice meal, then went home because there were no issues to fix.

Freed up five person-days each quarter

The self-healing and auto-scaling mechanisms in Red Hat OpenShift 4 have also freed up valuable resources for Salling Group. Previously, Chaturvedi and his team would spend at least five person-days each quarter on regular maintenance of the OKD environment. “There was always something we needed to do on the machines,” said Chaturvedi. “With Red Hat OpenShift 4 on Google Cloud, we now have a stable environment that we spend almost zero time maintaining.”

Chaturvedi’s team no longer has to spend valuable time ensuring clusters are up or worrying about something happening to one of the nodes. He added that “the self-healing in Red Hat OpenShift 4 is really amazing; we really like that it’s available out of the box”. For developers, it means they can focus on their deliveries rather than getting held up by environmental issues.

Being able to add an extra node at the click of a button when you’re running out of capacity is equally important to Salling Group. “We just have to click, and we have an extra node,” said Chaturvedi. “And if we have too many nodes, we can remove one at the click of a button, knowing everything will continue to work.”

Reduced time-to-market for new nodes and new clusters

With Red Hat OpenShift, a new node can be available in less than ten minutes—a far cry from the three months’ wait of yesteryear. Previously, Salling Group would need to follow a rigid process whenever it needed additional capacity. Chaturvedi and his team would need to give three months’ advance notice.

“With Red Hat OpenShift on Google Cloud, we get the dynamic behavior that allows us to change capacity quickly whenever we need to,” said Chaturvedi. “Being able to add extra capacity very quickly when we run short of resources is a very, very big improvement for us.” Provisioning a new cluster is also much faster; it takes half an hour at most compared to up to eight hours with OKD.

From the developers’ perspective, the new environment has cut the time it takes to deploy application changes from 45 minutes to less than three. “Migrating to Red Hat OpenShift 4 on Google Cloud has brought us continuous delivery,” said Chaturvedi. “Developers have more confidence to do frequent deployments and make frequent changes.”

Made access to enterprise-level support easy

Salling Group never felt alone, revealed Chaturvedi—a stark contrast to the Group’s previous experience when working with OKD. Whenever it needed assistance, Red Hat Support was just a phone call away. “We are very happy with the active support we have from Red Hat,” said Chaturvedi. “We simply created a support ticket and from there we were able to talk to someone. They were always able to guide us.”

Expanding success into the future

Migrating to Red Hat OpenShift on Google Cloud has already brought Salling Group considerable cost savings—and Chaturvedi sees more savings on the horizon. “Having a dynamic environment means we no longer have to pay millions for a fixed number of servers that we need to keep for the whole year even if we are not using them,” said Chaturvedi. “We’re working on using the full power of the cloud to reduce costs even further.”

Chaturvedi’s team is thinking of shutting down the whole development environment and reducing the capacity of the pre-production environment after working hours to cut costs—a capability that was not possible before.

News of the team’s success has spread across Salling Group. “Now, other teams are interested in moving their applications to Red Hat OpenShift on Google Cloud,” said Chaturvedi.

About Salling Group

Salling Group operates more than 1,700 stores and web shops in Denmark, Poland, and Germany, and Starbucks and Carl’s Jr. franchises in Denmark. Its 61,000 colleagues generated a turnover of 66,2 billion kroner in 2021.





About Red Hat Innovators in the Open

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 facebook.com/redhatinc
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North America
 1 888 REDHAT1
 www.redhat.com

**Europe, Middle East,
and Africa**
 00800 7334 2835
 europe@redhat.com

Asia Pacific
 +65 6490 4200
 apac@redhat.com

Latin America
 +54 11 4329 7300
 info-latam@redhat.com