

Lifesum Case Study

About Lifesum:

Lifesum is a Stockholm-based digital health startup that offers its users a flexible platform to support and encourage a healthy, balanced lifestyle. Having already achieved over 6.5 million downloads across Europe, the Lifesum app is available on Android and iOS, and can be tailored by users and adapted to specific goals and aims, offering guidance based on individual data. Lifesum's vision is to make people healthier and happier by helping users to forge good habits on their journey towards a better lifestyle, as well as an improved overall quality of life.

What is your business challenge?

The Lifesum platform consists of applications for iOS, Android and web, and a joint backend API that supports them. The infrastructure is hosted on Amazon Web Services primarily using Ubuntu 12.04 LTS on application servers. We needed a simple and powerful tool for configuration management, application deployment and server provisioning. Prior to this we used another tool and various bash scripts to manage app deployments and remote commands execution. It was definitely a big problem provisioning and managing multiple environments and the differences between them.

How is Lifesum using Ansible?

We started using Ansible in February 2014. Shortly after that every back-end and front-end engineer at Lifesum was using Ansible playbooks to automatically spin up virtual development machines with Vagrant. Our goal was to ensure that everyone had exactly the same working environment as we deploy our applications regularly. Three months later all our environments, from developer's laptops to production instances on Amazon, were fully Ansible managed. We use AWS Auto Scaling and pre-bake Amazon AMI images with Ansible provisioning playbooks. When EC2 instances are launched by Auto Scaling, Ansible, triggered by cloud-init, runs provisioning playbooks, once again ensuring up to date configuration changes are applied, and pulling the latest applications versions from repositories. Ansible has helped us to automate, significantly simplify and speed up the process of dynamic resources scaling.

We also make use of a limited set of tasks, from provisioning playbooks, to power one command application deployments. Ansible roles and playbooks are reused in various scenarios. Ansible has also aided us in ad-hoc remote commands, both across the whole infrastructure, and in specific environments, such as minor configuration changes and services administration.

What technology or products did you use in the past to solve this problem, if any?

We previously used Fabric to manage the deployments.

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"Every developer at Lifesum runs deployments today instead of having a release manager handling a complex procedure."

-Michal Gasek
SysOps Engineer / DBA



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What are your results with Ansible?

We had limited experience with configuration management tools and Ansible shined among competitors with its power and simplicity. It allowed us to focus on getting things done well in a timely and reliable manner, instead of spending time learning to use the tools. Agentless design allowed quick adoption. Our main programming language is Python and Ansible being written in Python was a nice bonus.

Application deployments became an easy and smooth process. Every developer at Lifesum runs deployments today with Ansible instead of having a release manager handling a complex procedure. We deploy as many times per day as we wish and rollback fast when needed.

The greatest thing about Ansible and having infrastructure as code is that every instance can be rebuilt and reconfigured within minutes instead of hours. All this using a self-documented, repeatable process with guaranteed immutability. Developers can focus on building and delivering great product features instead of solving inconsistencies, misconfigurations and software version problems, thanks to the Ansible provisioner in Vagrant. As we integrated Ansible into the bootstrapping procedure of EC2 instances, I stay assured that configuration of every instance looks exactly as desired and Auto Scaling can spin up new machines rapidly.

Do you have plans to use Ansible moving forward?

Without doubt. Ansible is an essential tool in everyday work for us. We are currently working on taking things to the next level and utilizing an extensive set of Ansible cloud modules to orchestrate and configure our complete Amazon infrastructure and services.