

Ziff Media Group Accelerates Time to Value with D2iQ Konvoy

Goes Live with Staging and Production Environments in Less Than Two Months

Introduction

In an age where business velocity is critical to success, today's leading companies are continually looking ahead at new tools and disciplines emerging from the Devops landscape. Because it's a space where if you fall behind, you can fall behind very quickly.

That was the case for Ziff Media Group, a portfolio of leading digital properties in technology, culture, and shopping that reaches over 100 million readers each month. Ziff Media Group were early adopters of cloud native technologies, like Kubernetes. And for a three-person Devops team that supports a 260-person company, it allows them to be much more agile when it comes to launching new services and taking advantage of new technologies.

"We made the switch to Kubernetes because this was where the current development was happening, and if we didn't, we'd eventually fall behind," explains Chris Kite, Director of Technology. "At the time, we weren't experts in the space or had any hands-on experience with it yet. Our main goal was to invest in a platform that was cost-effective and had good feature support for Kubernetes on AWS. And it seemed like the Kubernetes service we initially selected was going to give us the most bang for our buck."

Ziff Media Group Project At-a-Glance

Customer

Ziff Media Group - a digital portfolio in technology, culture, and shopping

Challenge

Unable to manage Kubernetes independently and get timely support

Solution

D2iQ Konvoy

Impact

Managing Kubernetes efficiently and independently with zero lock-ins or downtime

Challenge

The promise of Kubernetes is that it's supposed to be open, that it runs on most environments, and that it can be integrated with hundreds of third-party applications that all work well together. Ziff Media Group believed that their Kubernetes solution offered all of these benefits from the upstream projects. What they later realized was that it had some proprietary updates that locked them into versions or builds of components that prevented them from integrating with other upstream projects from the ecosystem. "When you do something with a closed, proprietary product, you are beholden to the product's engineers at all times," says Kite. "You can't fix something yourself. You can't find something new yourself. You can't put in a new integration yourself. They have to do it." This broke the promise of why they wanted to move to Kubernetes in the first place.

"When you actually start using the applications that cluster managers provide you, you start noticing the little differences," adds Brett Stewart, Senior DevOps Engineer. "They don't configure things to the default nature. When you want to do something simple like adding a Prometheus service monitor, you follow the steps the open source product gives you, but it doesn't work. So you have to go back to the Kubernetes provider to see why and do what they say."

In addition to having an open Kubernetes solution, Kite and Stewart wanted a dedicated support team that could be there for quick responses, ideally over Slack because that is where they do their work every day. Prior to partnering with D2iQ, external support was only available through ticketing systems and response times were lagging. So when they experienced outages, it would take days, even weeks, for a support person to get back to them. For an ecommerce company like Ziff Media Group, those emergencies can have a significant impact on the business. "Brett would be trying to put out a fire instead of doing the things that I'd have him working on," explains Kite. "When 30 developers are blocked for 30 minutes a day, that can add up in costs fast. Between Brett and I, we spent 30-40 hours internally writing support tickets for DNS issues because the support that was provided was neither competent nor adequately engaged with us. We couldn't help but ask, "are we getting the value from what we're paying for support every year if we have to do it ourselves?"

Solution

From an executive decision-making level, Kite needed a product that was open, reliable, and made it possible to use open source products that they could plug in and implement themselves. They also wanted a dedicated support team that could be there for quick responses in the event of an emergency, and not have to wait hours or days for each message to come back. Those were their main challenges with their previous Kubernetes vendor, and was what drove the decision to migrate to D2iQ Konvoy.

"That was the main thing that sold me on D2iQ as far as support," says Kite. "The speed, the competence, and the ability to meet us where we're at - on Slack. The support engineers are very fast at getting answers to us quickly, even if they don't immediately know the answer. The engagement and the knowledge on D2iQ end has been very confidence inspiring and that is not something we saw from other vendors in the space."

"The openness is top of mind for Kubernetes, especially for Brett. Because when I've asked him to do something like implement metrics, logging, or traffic ingress, he doesn't want to have to wait in a queue for an engineer to get back to him about how that can be done for weeks. For something like D2iQ Konvoy, it's open, but just nicely wrapped up in a neat package. It uses pure open source versions of these different components and provides them ala carte with recommended versions and solutions for doing things."

"The biggest thing I enjoy about D2iQ Konvoy is that everything is pure open source," says Stewart. "Whenever I want to scale out Prometheus, Grafana, or Elasticsearch, or change configurations or authentications, I can go directly to the website documentation and just do it — everything works out of the box. I don't have to reach out to support, wait a few days to get an answer, and keep going back and forth. I'm able to do my own research, get stuff done, and have D2iQ there for back-up support if it's needed. I don't have to rely on them 100% just to change something that is simple."

Impact

Within two months of implementing D2iQ Konvoy, Ziff Media Group was already in production and the time to value was immediate. The openness and stability of D2iQ Konvoy has given the Devops team the opportunity to get things done faster and more reliably.

The team currently supports 82 projects on Kubernetes and 175 applications within those projects, and they're launching new products every month. In addition, the data and analytics team is able to test things with full logging and metrics, as if they were in production. "Having that local development has given our developers even better productivity and better confidence that when they're launching in production, their app is still working exactly the same as it did as when it was in development," explains Kite.

With D2iQ Konvoy, the team is no longer doing things day-to-day with Kubernetes. Developers can deploy their apps with a low barrier to entry. And the turnaround time from standing up the cluster to getting the necessary tools enabled has improved tremendously. "Now we can stand up sandbox clusters which are identical to production within 30 minutes to test out new features before moving them to production. This will result in lower impact on the production servers," says Stewart.

If something breaks, time-to-resolution is low and the competence of D2iQ support engineers is high. "With D2iQ support, the initial response for all of our tickets has been around 15 minutes, which is 50% faster than it was before," says Stewart. "What sets D2iQ support apart from others is that they have a Devops mindset and understand the impact that our issue is causing. Rather than adding a quick fix, they dig deep to find the long-term solution, which allows us to get production up and running as quickly as possible."

At the same time, D2iQ Konvoy positions Ziff Media Group to innovate further. "The landscape is always changing and if you're not moving ahead, you're falling behind," Kite concludes. "With D2iQ Konvoy, our long-term strategy is to explore the different offerings available in each area, like metrics, alerting, logging, scheduled jobs, storage, and have our stack hammered out. Have it keep working and stay on it for at least a couple of years."

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