

[Case study]



Laying the odds: Paf places bet on Aiven for Kafka

Paf case study

Paf is a physical and online gambling operator in the Baltics. Paf is run by the Government of Åland with a mission to generate profit for the benefit of the Ålandic society.

Overview

Currently the company contributes around €20 million in gambling-derived funds to the government every year. These funds are then distributed by the Allocation Council to various essential local projects ranging from culture and education all the way to sustainability.

To drive their mission, Paf has to deal with the always evolving data needs of online and physical casinos, player authentication and financial transactions aboard cruise ships that are frequently offline, and complex internet gaming regulations.

Moving from old-fashioned mechanical slot machines to a modern, online, hybrid gaming infrastructure in a heavily-regulated climate is a complex endeavour, and it was never going to be easy.

The challenge

This work has required a number of disparate teams at the company – with more than 350 employees at last count – to create a variety of data pipelines to support a range of existing and yet-unknown future systems.

Many of Paf's data pipelines leverage a mix of legacy and current technologies, which requires building loosely-coupled applications and systems to support data schemas. Moreover, the implementation needs to work in real time.

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Roberto Zagni
Head of Data and CRM



Uses: Kafka, InfluxDB, Grafana **Cloud:** AWS

Industry: Media & Entertainment **Year founded:** 1966 **Company size:** 201-1000 employees



Paf's Head of Data and CRM, Robarto Zagni explains the difficulty,

"Our data warehousing, BI, and CRM applications provide marketing and support teams with the data they need. In that function, we are also the ones building infrastructure to move the data around...and while [our old] systems work, they're not so open or easily interfaceable for other parts of the company."

"Apache Kafka is so important that we had to be sure that the company handling it knows what they're doing."

Robarto Zagni
Head of Data and CRM

Additionally, Paf needs to be able to quickly handle GDPR — particularly related to identifying information — in data that is both in transit and at rest. A system like Apache Kafka enables this - but how to begin?

The solution

Zagni reported that he viewed running Kafka in-house as a risk primarily because no one in the company had experience in running Kafka clusters. They could either train or hire people, but these were both inefficient routes.

So Paf looked into a third option: buying Kafka as a service. After considering Confluent's hosted Kafka, they decided to let Aiven handle the SLA, monitor the cluster, and maintain security updates.

Besides competitive pricing, the flexibility of future schemas and the freedom from data setup and management overhead were key factors in deciding to go with Aiven for Kafka. Manager of System Ops, Fredrik Wiklund explains:

"Aiven for Kafka was a really good option for us because, as we're moving to AWS, we could use the Bring Your Own Account option. We handle the AWS accounts and have more control over our data, while Aiven handles Kafka."

Wiklund also enjoys the human touch and dedication to security that working with the team entails:

"We can just walk over to them if we have anything we want to discuss. And Aiven is ISO 27001 certified already. We did an external audit on Aiven's Information Security Management System and were really impressed about how Aiven is taking information security seriously."

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The outcome

With multiple teams serving a myriad of purposes, not always a clear interface between many functions (and data pipelines), the need to spin up custom pipelines fast, and the scrutiny of both local regulatory requirements and GDPR, Paf needed a messaging solution that was secure, loosely-coupled, flexible, transparent, and managed, so they could stay focused on their core business. At the intersection of all of these is Aiven for Kafka.