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THE ALLANT GROUP
MOVES DATA SECURITY
TO THE CLOUD

TOKENEX

ON-PREMISE TOK ENIZATION AND DATA VAULTING MOVES TO THE TOKENEX CLOUD FOR INCREASED FLEXIBILITY AND LOWER PCI COMPLIANCE COSTS

The Allant Group, headquartered in Naperville, Illinois, combines customer and business intelligence applications to help enterprise and mid-market clients gain more valuable insights and drive marketing performance of omni-channel business. That means that Big Data is at the very heart of its operations. Allant collects and aggregates large volumes of PCI (payment card information), bank account information, demographics, and personally identifiable information (PII). Allant's clients—in the telecommunications, retail, media, publishing, travel, sporting events, financial services, healthcare, technology, and automotive industries—receive custom-tailored subsets of these enormous data sets to use with Allant's applications to power their marketing programs.

Receiving, storing, and transmitting such copious amounts of PCI and PII data entails inherent risk not only to Allant, but to their clients, as well. Allant's clients come to them because they want professionals who understand that risk, knowing that if any of that data were is mishandled, stolen by hackers, or exposed in a data breach, it would be disastrous. Therefore, Allant has always carefully guarded the sensitive data by maintaining its own highly secure IT environment with an on-premise tokenized PCI Island—a computing and data storage entity that is isolated on its own network, separate from the other business systems and processes. Allant analytic and marketing applications make tokenized calls to the databases in the PCI Island when processing sensitive data. Only tokens representing the real data are used outside of the PCI Island.

Daniel Iantorno, Allant's Chief Information Officer, describes the evolution of their system and why the company determined change was needed. "A couple of years ago, we took a big picture review of our IT infrastructure. It had evolved over the years into an on-premise system of information processing resources to support the core analytics and campaign management applications for our clients. In addition, we had a well-established and comprehensive set of policies and procedures for data security in place. While this system served our customers' needs and maintained the security of sensitive data, we wanted to move completely to a Software as a Service (SaaS) Cloud Platform to save on IT maintenance costs and increase application delivery flexibility as we continue to grow our business."

Since then, under Iantorno's leadership, Allant has been busy re-architecting their computing platform based on a hybrid cloud enablement strategy, knocking down one challenge after another. The last main challenge to moving operations and applications entirely to a Cloud Platform was the on-premise PCI Island. As Allant's business expanded, the hardware, software infrastructure, and compliance reporting requirements needed to support the PCI Island also had to continue expanding in order to keep up with increasing data demands. "Tokenization and PCI-compliance are areas we'd rather not put our time and energy into as they don't add direct value to our customers," says Iantorno. The PCI Island was one of the last pieces that needed to be moved to the Cloud so that Allant can keep innovating its core analytics and marketing applications.

LOOKING FOR A TOKENIZATION PARTNER IN THE CLOUD

Protecting sensitive data is obviously critical for reducing the risk of data theft and maintaining customer trust. But for most organizations it is a small part of daily business operations that often takes up an inordinate amount of IT budget and time. An on-premise tokenization service may function well, but there still exists an inherent risk of breach. The cost of keeping the system PCI compliant, with systematic testing, reporting, and upkeep of server and database patches can consume a large part of an IT budget and manpower. "We'd rather have that data protected by a partner for which tokenization and data vaulting is the primary capability," says Iantorno. "So to cut the anchor that the PCI island had become, we began to look for a security partner whose main expertise was data tokenization with a cloud architecture that could grow with our business."

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Researching data security providers, the Allant IT team also looked for a company that was a match with the way they envisioned growing the company. "It was important that we find the proper fit," says Iantorno. "We wanted a security partner that we could grow with, not one that we had to pay a large sum upfront and then grow into the service." A SaaS subscription model turned out to be the fit Allant needed. Tiered pricing provides financial consistency and predictability as well as the ability to grow as the amount of data that needs to be tokenized and vaulted increases.

Allant narrowed the list down to the incumbent tokenization provider and TokenEx. "We realized that tokenization and secure cloud data vaulting is the core of TokenEx's business," remarks Iantorno. "Most of the other vendors we looked at have other lines of business, and tokenization is a subset. From the start we had a high confidence in TokenEx's architecture, platform, and experience. They quickly understood our business practices and data security needs. This is important to us because, just as we consider The Allant Group to be highly focused experts in analytics and marketing, we expect our partners to be best in class in their technologies."

A key benefit that Allant focused on was TokenEx's elastic pricing model, which is based on unique identities being tokenized and vaulted, rather than the number of transactions. Other tokenization providers add a transaction charge every time a token or original value is accessed in the vaults. TokenEx's pricing model helps clients manage the costs of cloud tokenization and data vaulting, keeping the costs within a predictable and affordable range, and avoiding price surges when business accelerates.

TokenEx's Cloud Security Platform uses a combination of encryption, tokenization, and Cloud data vaulting to intercept incoming sensitive data at every possible entry point to ensure that no PCI or PII is accepted, stored, or transmitted by IT systems that could be hacked, infected with malware, or inadvertently exposed by personnel. For organizations that need to accept and store sensitive data sets, the TokenEx Cloud Security Platform provides solutions for all the collection points for sensitive data: web servers, call centers, card-reader devices, and via batch files to and from financial institutions. By eliminating sensitive data from internal IT systems, the scope of PCI compliance is greatly reduced, saving time and budget. Since PII has become a favorite target of hackers, protecting customers' personal data with tokenization prevents fraud and identity theft. TokenEx can tokenize any type of data, so PII along with PCI can be safely vaulted away from on-premise business systems and replaced with tokens that are mathematically unrelated to the original data and, thus, useless to data thieves.

EXCELLING IN RESPONSIVE SERVICE, EVEN IN PRESALES

Allant's existing banks and trading partners had previously certified the tokenization and PCI compliance of the on-premise system. With TokenEx preparing to replace the existing system, it became necessary for its tokenization processes to be certified with these specific partners, as well. "TokenEx jumped through hoops to work with our specific banking partners to become certified even before we committed to using their platform," says Iantorno. "So just getting to the starting line during our presales talks, the TokenEx team proved their commitment to a high level of service."

The existing token schemas from the on-premise system also had to be re-created by TokenEx, the field sizes had to match exactly, and the algorithms that create tokens from the PCI and PII data had to produce the same types of outputs as the legacy on-premise system. To facilitate this smooth transition, an Allant Project Manager created use cases for each of the vendors that defined the capability needed from TokenEx to seamlessly work with them. "TokenEx did all this work up front as a proof of concept to win our business. After that we had a high degree of faith that the TokenEx team was able to take our current tokenization implementation and transition it to their cloud platform," remembers Iantorno.

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THE RIGHT FIT BY DESIGN

A primary goal of the project was to make no changes to existing business processes — including those of the Allant partners – after the transition to the TokenEx Cloud Security Platform. CIO Iantorno explains that "Our current hub-and-spoke architecture means we receive data and push it out to multiple partners and customers to accomplish, for example, a 360-degree marketing analysis. So the cloud tokenization must fit the same tokenization and data retrieval touch points and sources as the current system so that no changes are needed to the many different business processes." For example, Allant receives data from its banking partners in batch file format, and it's necessary for the tokenization process to accept those file formats, vault the data by partner accounts, tokenize the sensitive data, and transmit the token files to Allant's systems via secure FTP. "Many of the other tokenization vendors could not handle the batch file process—only real-time conversions via an API," says Iantorno. "TokenEx can do both, so they were able to fit neatly into our existing processes."

This adaptability is possible with the TokenEx Open Security Architecture because it is designed to accommodate all types of data formats; interoperate with any payment gateway and financial institutions worldwide; and integrate workflows from third-party services such as fraud detection, account refresh providers, and marketing analytic programs like Allant. It's this openness by design that gave Allant assurance that TokenEx could ultimately transform their on-premise tokenization to a Cloud Tokenization Architecture without forcing changes to existing business processes.

THE JOURNEY TO THE CLOUD CONTINUES

Allant offers its services on a SaaS platform, and Allant CEO Gaurav Issar foresees the continuing evolution of the company's cloud services with TokenEx. "Allant has always provided a flexible solution platform that enables us to start working with clients in a specific area, whether that is a capability, marketing program, or top business initiative, and then adjust and scale over time with increasing or changing requirements and complexity. TokenEx's Cloud Security Platform mirrors our flexible approach to accommodating clients' requirements, working with us to provide the best solution at the right price. As we evolve our platform to incorporate additional cloud services and expand our customers in new vertical markets such as banking and financial institutions, we believe TokenEx will keep all our new services secure and flexible. In essence, we expect the security of our platform to go from great to greater, and TokenEx will be with us as we continue on this journey to the Cloud in 2017."

CONNECT WITH TOKENEX TO SECURE SENSITIVE DATA

Your business data belongs to you. Your customers' data belongs to them. Keeping sensitive data of all types out of the reach of hackers and other unauthorized entities is the job of TokenEx. You owe it to yourself and your customers to secure your enterprise against attack. You can depend on the TokenEx Cloud Security Platform to do just that. Contact us at sales@tokenex.com to learn how we can eliminate the risk of PII and PCI data theft and reduce the cost of PCI compliance.

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