Secret Sauce Partners and Banzai Cloud
The Perfect Fit
CASE STUDY

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About the Customer

Secret Sauce Partners (SSP) is a San Francisco-based startup that maintains a European engineering office in Budapest, Hungary. SSP services some of the most iconic apparel brands in the world, such as Gucci, Saks Fifth Avenue, Nordstrom and Walmart. Its flagship product is called Fit Predictor, which helps shoppers determine the best-fit size for apparel they might want to purchase. Fit Predictor is integrated into high-traffic e-commerce websites and has to sustain the enormous traffic from its customers' websites. SSP has operated cloud-based infrastructure since its founding in 2010.

secret sauce PARTNERS

What were you using before Banzai Cloud Pipeline?

Over the years we've used various Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS) offerings, such as Heroku and later Amazon's Elastic Beanstalk and Elastic Container Service. Once Kubernetes emerged, we saw its strategic importance early and decided to use it as the foundation for our applications. We saw in 2016 that Kubernetes and the Cloud Native ecosystem around it would be a formidable force in the industry, both from a technological and commercial perspective.

What problems were you facing?

As we grew, the cost of PaaS solutions, such as Heroku, grew as well. Underwhelmed with what AWS had to offer as a PaaS, we decided to build our own Kubernetes-based application infrastructure from scratch. We deployed Kubernetes 1.5 and then got stuck running that version for a long time. Our limited team always had more important things to do than to worry about regular infrastructure upgrades. Eventually, both our clusters and the "plumbing" were out of date.

Could you tell us a little more about your experience with Kubernetes?

We saw, and still see, Kubernetes as a future-proof solution. We adopted it with enthusiasm relatively early, in 2016. Our company built up a lot of knowledge around it over the years. We did this the hard way, since we had to learn how to build everything from scratch. It took us a long while to figure out best practices, but we were satisfied with the results: we gained flexibility and control over our applications and reduced our operating costs. We built a service that could be deployed relatively easily on a different cloud if needed. And while we did end up staying on AWS, we considered doing just that a number of times over the course of multiple years due to customer requests, and had the technology base to deliver on it as well.

What were the challenges in your approach to Kubernetes?

While we were satisfied with the results, we couldn't keep up with the continual changes in the Kubernetes ecosystem. We looked at using Amazon's managed Kubernetes service (EKS) but it did not offer significant enough productivity gains. We stuck with EC2 virtual machines and still run Kubernetes on EC2 directly. When you look at operating a service in production, Kubernetes itself ends up being a vital, but relatively small piece of the puzzle. A lot of effort goes into the "scaffolding" that is necessary to operate a service around observability pipelines, cluster orchestration, scaling, security, upgrades, etc. We could build a lot of that infrastructure out of Cloud Native components, but the effort of maintaining it was high. We had to exert an increasing amount of effort to keep up with the evolution of the components and to manage our dependencies. At some point we reached the limit of what we were prepared to invest into our infrastructure team vs our core business, which meant that we were stuck with band-aid fixes for our platform instead of proactive evolution. After a while, demand from our development team led us to start looking for an external party that could help us meet our Cloud Native infrastructure requirements.

How did you go about searching for a solution?

We'd been tracking the ecosystem and focused on Banzai Cloud early, after having read their blogs. We were impressed by their technical approach and focus. We selected Banzai Cloud Pipeline as the best choice for our needs after a few online meetings, and after kicking its tires on Banzai Cloud's hosted service.

Why Pipeline?

There are only a few products on the market that automate the production use of Cloud Native technologies. It's always a challenge to figure out whether something is truly worthy of production use, but we felt that we had a good sense of what the Banzai Cloud team had been up to through their technical blogs and open source projects. When something wasn't already a part of their product, we were impressed with the speed at which their team reacted to our proposals and came up with solutions for our use-cases. We built a great working relationship over the years. A key differentiator is that Banzai Cloud addresses complex problems holistically, not just at the component level.

Was it difficult to get started?

We benefited from Pipeline right out of the gate, since it brought a new level of standardization to our operations, as well as a slew of new features. Not only could we easily upgrade to newer versions of our infrastructure components but we also benefited from their integrated services (e.g. secret management, log collection, monitoring, security scans, dashboards). We benefited from high quality tooling and implementations for both the features that we knew we needed, and those on our "wouldn't that be nice"-list that we'd never implemented before.

How has it helped you to overcome the problems you had previously?

Banzai Cloud has definitely helped us focus our internal efforts and allowed us to work with a much smaller team than what we would have otherwise needed. We also value the flexibility of Banzai Cloud as a solution, because we've been able to tailor it to our needs with minimal effort.

Tell me about the most positive experience you've had using the product.

We really appreciated how easy it was to get started, and how smoothly things went when we took Pipeline into production. The necessary configuration and integration steps were easy to do, either on our own, or with Banzai Cloud's help. Our infrastructure-related workloads decreased dramatically, by about 80%, and we get to keep our infrastructure up to date with minimal effort.

What is your single biggest reason for recommending Banzai Cloud Pipeline?

Banzai Cloud has a massive amount of Kubernetes knowledge and a wide breadth of expertise across all layers of the Cloud Native stack. Their products are well designed and easy to use. It's very difficult and expensive to build up an internal team to support Kubernetes and the Cloud Native ecosystem. Banzai Cloud made doing that much simpler and more cost effective.

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