

Who They Are

SlideShare is the world's largest community for sharing presentations—the YouTube of slideshows. The free, easy-to-use service lets individuals or organizations upload and share PowerPoint, PDF, and Word Keynote documents up to 100MB in size.

When uploaded, the original presentation files are converted to a navigable Flash format and posted along with text transcriptions of each slide, allowing the presentation to be indexed and tracked by Internet search engines. Viewers can watch the slideshow play as a video, manually advance or reverse through slides, and even download the original presentation file (if allowed by its creator). The service provides a wide range of sharing and social networking features, including capabilities to:

- Search for presentations by topic and content
- Download original presentation files
- Tag and embed slideshows within third-party blogs, private websites, and social networking platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace)
- Share slideshows privately with colleagues and clients, and via intranet
- Share slideshows publicly with millions of global viewers
- Post, review, and respond to viewer comments
- Create and join groups to connect with individuals and organizations with shared interests
- Synch audio to slideshows to create "slidecasts"

This robust feature set has made SlideShare a valuable platform for marketing, online education, corporate training, entertainment distribution, tradeshow and event content distribution, lead generation, and personal and professional networking.

SlideShare launched in October of 2006. The service's founders were originally inspired to create the site through interaction with conference speakers interested in a way to provide their presentations to attendees. No similar solution was available at the time, and SlideShare understood that such a site could meet a need that extended far beyond the conference industry—by tapping into the worldwide use of PowerPoint, they would have a solution that appealed to everyone from preachers in Africa to teachers in New Orleans.

The site was featured by the technology blog TechCrunch on its first day in service, and was immediately overwhelmed by user traffic and registrations. Today, it has more than one-million registered users, one-million uploaded presentations, 5,000 presentations loaded every day, and 12-million unique visitors each month. In 2008 it received more than \$3-million in venture capital investment. It continues to expand its features and functionality, recently releasing a software plug-in that allows slideshows to be uploaded to the site directly from within PowerPoint, and a mobile version of its site that gives users exceptional access and control from their web-enabled phones.

SlideShare — At A Glance

Company
SlideShare

Location
San Francisco, CA; New Delhi, India

URL
www.slideshare.net

Industry
Content Sharing and Social Networking

Profile
World's largest online presentation sharing service and social networking community.

Challenge
Needed a hosting partner with a highly stable infrastructure, consistent performance, and reliable support options.

Solution
Selected SoftLayer®, leveraging automated services and industry-leading infrastructure to maintain exceptional uptime and system control.

■ Challenge

As a rapidly growing startup, SlideShare wanted to be able to concentrate its resources on developing its core service offering and supporting end users, not on building out and managing its underlying IT.

“We tried different hosts to find the level of support we need and the best fit for our operations,” said Jonathan Boutelle, Head Geek of SlideShare. “Even with a host that had 24-hour support, we always ran into what I would describe as ‘human element’ issues. No two people do the same thing the same way—even if they are skilled and trained. ‘Server A’ will be setup differently than ‘Server B.’ Or networking configurations would vary widely.”

SlideShare’s desire for better hosting support and system management options became particularly pronounced in April, 2008, when the site was targeted with a massive distributed denial of service attack (DDOS). Over the course of three days, the site was hit by multiple attacks, taking the site down for more than 12 hours.

SlideShare’s hosting provider was less than adequately responsive to the company’s support requests. “The attackers managed to flood a 1Gbps uplink from Asia, which caused all websites at our hosting company to start experiencing packet loss. As a result, the hosting provider cut us off from their network!” Boutelle said. “We realized that if we were going to successfully defend ourselves from the attack, we would need to go outside our existing infrastructure.”

The company needed a new, cost-effective hosting partner that provided a highly stable infrastructure, consistent performance, and streamlined support.

■ Solution and Results

As a temporary solution to its DDOS attacks—as well as a test case to gauge SoftLayer’s capabilities—SlideShare setup and redirected all of its traffic through a single server in SoftLayer’s Dallas data center. With SoftLayer’s advanced security technologies, such as TippingPoint® IPS appliances and Core Controllers, the shield successfully thwarted additional threats. SlideShare soon decided to move all of its servers to SoftLayer.

“We have always tried to automate all of our maintenance and configuration tasks,” said Boutelle. “SoftLayer shares that philosophy and approach. They have taken humans out of the equations where they aren’t necessary—where people are the random variable. It gives us consistency, which is exceptionally important to reducing our business risk. We can order a machine and it’s up in less than two hours. We can add a hardware firewall or load balancer with zero downtime. OS reloads in less than an hour. No humans involved. Always the same outcome—flawless.”

With only a couple months of planning (and only 90 minutes of downtime), the site migrated to powerful new machines, each with 32GB RAM, and 15k RPM SCSI drives RAID-10 arrays.

“They have made deployment and management so fast and easy, what we have here is the scalability of cloud and virtual solutions but with the power of dedicated machines. Having that power is essential for our operations, and having that scalability puts us where we need to be to grow,” said Boutelle.

After moving the site, SlideShare’s response rate dropped 200ms, the speed of page loads and Google crawls dramatically increased, and the company has found itself able to focus more attention on its own core business efforts.

“Our crew spends less time on maintenance and firefighting, and more time working on new ideas. We’re spending less time on the phone with end-users and our hosting service,” said Boutelle. “That has given us a better foundation under us for planning ahead. We don’t have to worry about staffing for infrastructure support. We have it in hand, and for the rare occasion we actually need a human to do something, SoftLayer has people we can call. We can think more about getting talented individuals that will write the software that will take our core services farther and in new directions.”