

The Power of an API-First Mindset

Case Study ▶ How Blue Altair helped Allied Solutions drive their digital transformation by adopting an API-First business strategy.

“We started from a place with organically grown APIs at different maturity levels scattered across different applications...”

– Brett Mitchell, Allied Solutions



Allied Solutions, LLC is one of the largest providers of insurance, lending, risk management, and data-enabled products, assisting over 4,000 financial institutions across North America. In 2019, Allied sought the help of Blue Altair, a digital transformation firm, with the aim to establish an API program and deploy Google Apigee. Over the subsequent three years, Blue Altair not only helped Allied overcome the practical hurdles of API implementation, but also developed a comprehensive strategy and roadmap for an API-driven digital transformation.

Problems and Challenges

While Allied Solutions’ core products relied on APIs, their APIs were not originally built using common standards, were not centrally managed, and lacked reuse and a common repository. Additionally, an API gateway—often the core of an API ecosystem—had not been deployed. As such, Allied did not follow an API-First culture within the organization and APIs were not treated as products.

“We started from a place with organically grown APIs at different maturity levels scattered across different applications,” said Brett Mitchell, Senior Vice President of Technology at Allied. “We initially just wanted to add a management layer to keep track of all of these assets, but over the course of the project we pivoted to a cloud-native deployment. We also focused on creating a consistent look and feel for our APIs so they weren’t so fragmented, and were more modernized and consumable.”

Solution and Approach

Blue Altair helped Allied Solutions navigate through these challenges in a multi-phased approach. Their first step was an API maturity assessment for the current state of Allied APIs. An API strategy, which included a program and technical strategy, was defined to align with the business goals of Allied. The strategy included a roadmap for setting up a robust and scalable future state API architecture, an agile DevOps approach, and a Developer Portal for ecosystem enablement. All of this was backed by a strong API governance as well. This paved the foundations for the future API implementations. As a next step, Apigee, a leading API Management product from Google, was installed on-premise as a centralized API Management platform to manage and secure all of Allied's APIs in a consistent manner.

Next, a technical foundation for APIs was built on Apigee. This included: Apigee standards for security, DevOps, API proxy logging, validation, error handling framework, Apigee integration with syslog tools Splunk and QRadar for API logging purposes, API validation and version control management component, API analytics and finally, proven, reusable deployment scripts.

This was followed by the automated migration and full lifecycle testing and deployment of all Allied APIs to the Apigee platform. Apigee enabled Allied to securely expose and connect to their existing backend services from CenterPoint®, IQQ and Unitrac. Pass through API proxy was configured on Apigee to connect to the Allied products that provided their services as SOAP and REST endpoints.

In the meantime, Google released Apigee X – their modern SaaS version of Apigee. Blue Altair guided Allied in its early adoption and migration to Apigee X, while navigating the technical complexities associated with the operation.

Blue Altair supported Allied with the following during their on-boarding journey with Apigee X:

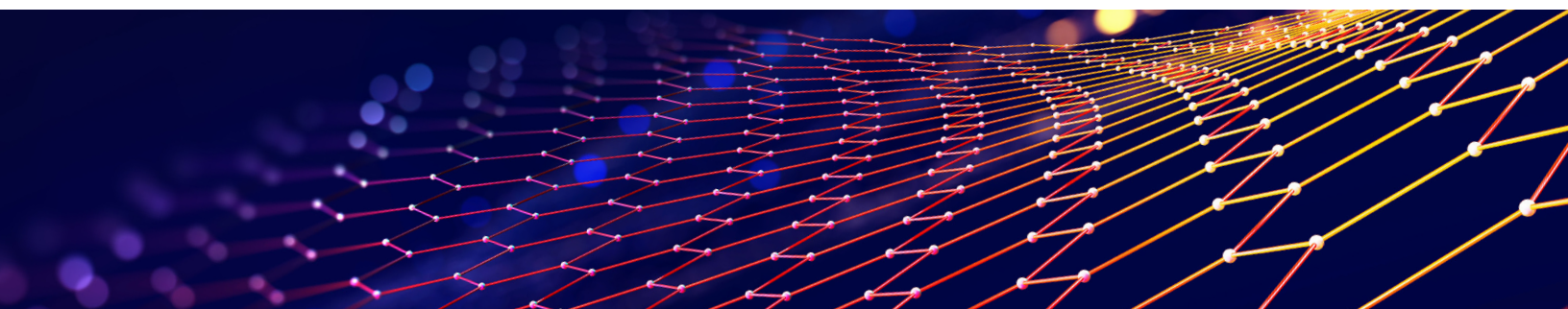
Recommended the selection for Apigee X license and the right organization / environment packs.

Set up high availability configuration with a redundant partner interconnect connectivity to on-premise via Megaport MCR.

Improved API security posture using Cloud Armor, WAF and secure TLS connectivity.

Optimized API performance using Cloud CDN.

“There were many complexities to connect with the internal system of Allied to Apigee X, which even Google team were addressing for the first time,” said Brajesh De, Blue Altair's Senior Director of API Management and Integration. “Through projects like these, I think even Google has learned valuable lessons about migrations to these platforms.”



Impact and Conclusion



“We are still using a lot of the strategies that we learned from Blue Altair.”

– Kevin Spence, Allied Solutions

The collaboration with Blue Altair resulted in a sound and successful transition for Allied Solutions. Allied's products now run on well-organized, documented APIs, exhibiting a high level of API maturity. The adoption of an API-First approach, combined with the implementation of DevOps, resulted in significant operational cost savings and increased speed to market.

“When we started this project, our API maturity could probably be categorized as a Level 0,” said Kevin Spence, Vice President of Application Development at Allied. “Now we’re easily more like a Level 3 or 4. We are still using a lot of the strategies that we learned from Blue Altair.”

Moreover, the move to Apigee X on Google Cloud led to a substantial reduction in hardware and infrastructure costs. Allied's security posture improved, with the application of Cloud Armor and other API security technologies like OAuth. Application and API performances saw a boost using CDN and internal IPs for communication to backend systems. Furthermore, the introduction of automated deployments using CI/CD reduced the time to market for new APIs significantly.

“Blue Altair was really beneficial for Allied, and I’m sure that we couldn’t have done it without them. Their technical expertise and knowledge was critical for us getting to the finish line,” said Spence. “They took us through a challenging, rigorous process and we’re better for it in the end.”

About Blue Altair

Blue Altair is a niche, industry-recognized business and technology consulting firm that assists our clients with digital transformations. We offer Assessment and Strategy, Technology Implementation, and Managed Services in API Management and Integration; Data Management; Digital Application Development; and Data Science and AI. Our Client Success capability ensures a higher-than-industry rate of successfully delivered projects, with a primary focus on program and project management, business analysis, and quality assurance. Blue Labs is our innovation hub, where we use cutting-edge technology to build offerings that deliver accelerators and solutions. Our culture is the heart of our existence, and our core values are the key drivers for our handpicked, top-tier performers.

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