

2026-27 DCIG TOP 5 VMWARE ALTERNATIVES DISTRIBUTED ENTERPRISE EDITION



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VMware Alternatives // Distributed Enterprise Edition



Zadara zCompute

Nutanix Cloud Platform

Red Hat OpenShift

Scale Computing SC//Platform

SoftIron HyperCloud

**Products are listed with the licensee's product on top, followed by the other TOP 5 award recipients in alphabetical order.*

SOLUTIONS EVALUATED

1. Arcfra Enterprise Cloud Platform
2. Citrix XenServer
3. HivelO
4. HPE Morpheus VM Essentials
5. Microsoft Hyper-V
6. NodeWeaver
7. Nutanix Cloud Platform
8. OpenNebula
9. Oracle Virtualization
10. Proxmox Virtual Environment
11. Red Hat OpenShift
12. Scale Computing Platform™
13. SoftIron HyperCloud
14. StorMagic SvHCI
15. StorPool with Oracle Virtualization
16. SUSE Linux Enterprise Server
17. Verge.io VergeOS
18. Virtuozzo Hybrid Cloud
19. Zadara zCompute

VMWARE ALTERNATIVE FEATURES EVALUATED

- Data Resilience
- Deployment
- Licensing
- Management
- Modern Infrastructure
- Support

More Viable VMware Alternatives Emerging for Distributed Enterprises

The shockwave since Broadcom announced its changes to VMware software licensing continues to reverberate through distributed enterprises. Distributed enterprises already had to respond to Broadcom's decision to reduce the available VMware software licenses to three in late 2023.

Now, in 2026, Broadcom again decided to reduce its VMware software licenses to two: VMware Cloud Foundation (VCF) and VMware vSphere Foundation (VVF).¹ These two licensing options will result in distributed enterprises experiencing yet another increase in their VMware subscription licensing costs, further prompting them to adopt VMware alternatives.

The following activity supports this forecast adoption of VMware alternatives as evidenced by the following:

- Distributed enterprises now actively seek out and invite providers of VMware alternatives to compete for their existing VMware business.
- New providers of VMware alternatives have entered the market.
- Existing providers of VMware alternatives have introduced many new features into their software over the past two years to better compete with VMware.
- Providers have taken steps to customize and optimize their licensing for distributed enterprises.

The new features introduced have helped close the feature gap that persists between VMware and VMware alternatives. While VMware alternatives still have not and may never entirely close this gap, they have made significant software enhancements.

Further, VMware alternatives do not need to offer all VMware features to meet the needs of distributed enterprises. Rather, VMware alternative providers need to include the specific features that distributed enterprises need at a price point that distributed enterprises find attractive. A growing number of VMware alternatives have achieved this threshold.

Distributed enterprises should still take care to minimally take the following steps before making a change:

- Define the VMware software features they currently use.
- Quantify how broadly they use VMware and its features in their IT environment.
- Map their use of VMware features to comparable features in a VMware alternative.
- Identify viable options to migrate VMs and data from VMware to a VMware alternative.
- Identify a viable data protection solution for the VMware alternative.
- Ensure IT staff can manage and support the VMware alternative.

The number of VMware software features that a distributed enterprise uses and how broadly it uses them specifically influences any decision. Alternative hypervisor solutions continue to vary in their features, software licensing, and technical support options. These options and others all factor into selecting an appropriate VMware alternative.

VCF and VVF Only Remaining VMware Licensing Options

Many distributed enterprises do not need all the software functionality available in the VCF and VVF software licenses. This prompted them to obtain subscription-based software licenses for VMware vSphere Standard or vSphere Enterprise Plus over the past two years.

Continued

Distributed enterprises may deploy VMware alternatives as software, a pre-integrated appliance, or as an IaaS.

The vSphere Standard and Enterprise Plus 8.0 licenses gave them access to the core VMware ESXi features that they specifically needed. They both support features such as (*this is not an all-inclusive list*):

- Connectivity to external storage via Fibre Channel, iSCSI, NFS, and other storage networking protocols
- vCenter file-based backup and restore
- Virtual Volumes (vVols)
- VLAN-backed networking
- vMotion and Storage vMotion
- vSphere Lifecycle Manager

VMware vSphere Enterprise Plus then supports additional features. These include Distributed Resource Scheduler (DRS), I/O Controls, and Memory Tiering, among many others.

Distributed enterprises may access high-end features only by licensing either VCF or VVF. These features include all-flash hardware, data compression, data encryption, Quality of Service (QoS), and vSAN storage clusters, among others.²

However, beginning in January 2026 with VMware 9.0, Broadcom will only offer VCF and VVF software licenses. This will force distributed enterprises with existing VMware vSphere Standard or Enterprise Plus 8.0 subscription licenses to choose. They must then move to VCF or VVF before 2027 ends when their existing VMware vSphere licenses expire.³ Alternatively, they can choose and move their VMs to a VMware alternative.

The State of VMware Alternative Solutions

DCIG considered nearly 30 different VMware alternatives when preparing this report, of which it formally evaluated 19. Among these 19 VMware alternatives, providers offer them for deployment in at least three ways.

Distributed enterprises may deploy them as software, a pre-integrated appliance, or as an infrastructure-as-a-service (IaaS). Furthermore, VMware alternatives that support the software and IaaS deployment options may support deployment in one or more general-purpose clouds.

Multiple Software Licensing Options

Software licensing costs remain a focal point for many distributed enterprises as they consider VMware alternatives. Unlike Broadcom, which now only offers two VMware licensing options, distributed enterprises will find over ten licensing options among VMware alternatives. Further, they will often find VMware alternatives available at more attractive price points.

VMware alternatives differ in the number and types of software licensing options they offer. However, subscription-based software licensing represents the most readily available choice, with over 80 percent supporting this option. All-inclusive software licensing represents a distant second with over 60 percent of VMware alternatives offering this option.

Beyond these two licensing options, distributed enterprises will find choices on VMware alternatives that meet different needs and use cases. For example, some VMware alternatives offer:

- **Capacity-based licensing** where a distributed enterprise typically gets access to all software features and then pays based upon how much storage capacity it consumes.
- **Elastic licensing** that permits distributed enterprises to acquire, then release, additional software licenses for short periods to meet increased demand.
- **Feature or tier-based licensing** where a distributed enterprise must pay to access specific software features.

This option to choose VMware vSphere as a potential hypervisor option on a VMware alternative that offers an HCI platform will likely end by 2028.

- **Per core, per VM, per physical CPU, and per physical server licensing options.** These options give distributed enterprises flexibility to better manage software licensing costs. They may utilize more powerful servers, servers with fewer CPUs or cores, or a combination thereof.
- **Perpetual software licensing.** About 25 percent of VMware alternatives still allow distributed enterprises to acquire the software and then use it indefinitely.

VMware alternatives also offer different software licensing contract lengths. Over 60 percent offer a trial version of their software while over 40 percent offer a free community edition. Distributed enterprises that decide to license software may then choose contract lengths ranging from month-to-month to five-year or even perpetual software licenses. Nearly all providers (~80%) offer a one-year software licensing term for their VMware alternative.

Using a Linux KVM-based Hypervisor Becoming a Prerequisite

Moving to a VMware alternative will likely mean that by 2028 a distributed enterprise can no longer use VMware vSphere Standard or Enterprise Plus. A few VMware alternatives offer a hyperconverged infrastructure (HCI) platform option that supports VMware vSphere. This option to choose VMware vSphere as a hypervisor option will likely end by 2028. Distributed enterprises will then likely need to license VCF or VVF to continue using VMware vSphere.

This change will force any distributed enterprise that selects a VMware alternative to potentially adopt that provider's hypervisor. In most cases, this will require choosing a Linux Kernel-based Virtual Machine (KVM) hypervisor. However, a few VMware alternatives also support Microsoft Hyper-V.

While many distributed enterprises likely anticipated this forced changeover in a hypervisor, they also must evaluate their VM and data migration options. Nearly every provider offers one or more options to help a distributed enterprise migrate from VMware to their hypervisor.

The challenge becomes choosing from the available migration options. DCIG identified over 15 migration options that VMware alternative providers offer for VM and data migrations. These include agent-based migrations, agentless migrations, bulk migrations, cold migrations, and live migrations, among many more. VMware alternative providers with multiple migration options and professional services offer the greatest likelihood of a successful migration.

Data Resilience Capabilities Maturing

Part of selecting a VMware alternative requires a distributed enterprise to evaluate each offering's data resilience features. They must minimally evaluate its backup software options, cybersecurity features, disaster recovery (DR) capabilities, and highly available (HA) configurations. They may also look at advanced capabilities such as automated load balancing, failover to and failback from the cloud, and multi-site DR, among others.

Since DCIG's initial report on VMware alternatives in 2024, VMware alternatives have significantly matured their data resilience capabilities. For example, in 2024 many VMware alternatives relied on their own cloning, snapshot, and replication features for data protection.

Now, 18 months later, distributed enterprises may still use those options for data protection. However, more third-party backup solutions support VMware alternatives and can back up their data and VMs. Further, more VMware alternatives have begun to develop and offer data protection APIs that third-party backup software can use. While still in the early stages, DCIG expects more VMware alternatives to offer data protection APIs going forward.

Cybersecurity represents the other area where VMware alternatives continue to make enhancements. More offer options to encrypt and store data in an immutable format that protects data from ransomware events. Some have even begun offering more advanced features such as anomaly or ransomware detection. Here again, DCIG expects more VMware alternatives to implement more cybersecurity functionality in the coming years.

The flexibility to repurpose server hardware will vary by VMware alternative and use case.

Flexibility to Repurpose Existing Server Hardware

Distributed enterprises often express interest in reusing server hardware they already own and use to host VMware to re-host the VMware alternative. The flexibility to repurpose server hardware will vary by VMware alternative and use case.

Some VMware alternatives definitively support existing VMware server hardware. They provide plans, utilities, and technical support to facilitate repurposing existing server hardware to host their solution. Further, the software architecture of the VMware alternative may result in a distributed enterprise experiencing a performance boost using the same hardware.

Solutions from other VMware alternatives may not offer this same flexibility. In some cases, they provide pre-packaged solutions (software and hardware) that do not permit repurposing existing server hardware. In other cases, their software may have specific hardware requirements that preclude repurposing existing server hardware.

The Characteristics of a Distributed Enterprise

The definition and characteristics of a distributed enterprise do vary. An organization should therefore establish how closely it aligns with DCIG's characteristics of a distributed enterprise. DCIG would expect a distributed enterprise to possess one or more of the following characteristics:

- Has an annual revenue of at least \$10 million and no more than \$1 billion.
- Serves at least 50 and no more than 5,000 employees or contractors.
- Employs at least one IT administrator and up to 50 dedicated to IT infrastructure, operations, and end user support.
- Resides in at least 30 locations with the potential to have hundreds or thousands of sites.
- Uses cloud resources such as computing, cloud storage, or both.

The more of these distributed enterprise characteristics that an organization satisfies, the better this report will meet its needs.

Common Features across All VMware Alternatives

DCIG evaluated nearly 30 different VMware alternatives, of which 19 met DCIG's inclusion criteria for the Distributed Enterprise Edition. Across these 19 VMware alternatives, DCIG evaluated over 425 features and options. 90 percent or more of these VMware alternatives support the following features and options:

1. **Alerting and notification.** Every evaluated VMware alternative provides alerting and notification services. Nearly every solution supports email alerts and notifications with syslog and SNMP traps being the next two most supported options.
2. **Command-line interface (CLI).** IT administrators often want or need a CLI to facilitate scripting when performing specific administrative tasks. Each of these 19 solutions supports a CLI to perform these tasks. However, the commands that each solution supports in its CLI may differ. If IT administrators plan to use the CLI, they should verify the solution's CLI includes commands they need.
3. **Directory services.** Nearly every evaluated VMware alternative supports at least one directory service. Active Directory (AD) and Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) represent the two most supported directory services.
4. **Include their own hypervisor.** The hypervisor permits an enterprise to run on one or more VMs on a single computer. 95 percent of the 19 solutions offer their own hypervisor. Distributed enterprises should expect the solution to provide a Linux-based KVM hypervisor.

Over 90 percent of the providers have at least one option to migrate VMs or data from VMware to their VMware alternative.

5. **Make their solution available as a software product for on-premises deployment.** Software remains the primary way that distributed enterprises should expect to obtain and deploy a VMware alternative. Even then, they should only expect to have the option to deploy it on-premises. If distributed enterprises require other deployment options, they must quantify which options they need and validate that the solution supports them.
6. **Management interface with CLI, REST API, and web GUI options.** The management interface facilitates the management of the VMs, networking, storage, and other software features offered by the VMware alternative. Each includes a CLI, a web-based GUI, and REST APIs that distributed enterprises may use to manage the solution.
7. **Multiple options to migrate VMs and data from VMware to the VMware alternative.** Over 90 percent of the providers have at least one option to migrate VMs or data from VMware to their VMware alternative. However, across the evaluated solutions, each supports different migration options. The options commonly supported (over 60 percent) include agentless migrations, API/CLI scripted migrations, bulk migrations (multiple VMs), and cold migrations
8. **Offer multiple data protection features.** If using a VMware alternative, distributed enterprises may need to rely on, at least for now, the data protection features it offers. To meet this expectation, all VMware alternatives can perform some combination of clones, mirrors, replication or snapshots. Of available data protection options, nearly all (90%) support VM-level snapshots. These features provide distributed enterprises with a baseline level of data protection for their VMs, and the data hosted on them.
9. **Offer multiple options for high availability.** VMware alternative solutions all offer multiple HA features, with live migration or failover the only HA feature that they all support. Other HA features, that over 60 percent support, include automated load balancing, a cluster quorum mechanism, data integrity checks, multi-site DR, non-disruptive disaster recovery (DR), resource pools, and rolling upgrades.
10. **Professional services.** Properly configuring, deploying, and then managing a VMware alternative requires significant skill and knowledge. Further, many distributed enterprises may also need to migrate VMs and data from VMware to a VMware alternative. All VMware alternative providers offer support services in some form to help distributed enterprises perform these tasks. Among these services, over 90 percent of providers offer consulting services. Education and training, installation services, and migration services represent the next three most supported services.
11. **Run on x86 processors.** All evaluated VMware alternatives utilize and can run on server hardware with x86 processors.
12. **Software-defined networking (SDN).** SDN, included in all 19 solutions, minimizes the need for or takes the place of physical network switches. This feature handles, directs, and prioritizes the communication between the different nodes in the solution. Every VMware alternative supports this functionality, with 90 percent supporting the ability to define, interconnect, and manage virtual networks. Many support other SDN features such as load balancing, virtual firewalls, routing, and switching, among others.
13. **Software licensing.** Every VMware alternative provider utilizes software licensing. Subscription-based software licensing and all-inclusive licensing represent the two most supported options. The most supported lengths for licenses are (in order): one-year, three-year, and five-year options.
14. **Support Windows and Linux Guest Operating Systems (OSes).** Windows OS remains ubiquitous in distributed enterprises with distributed enterprises continuing to use Windows in their IT environments. However, distributed enterprises increasingly use Linux for performance, security, and software licensing reasons. Regardless of which guest operating systems (OSes) a distributed enterprise uses, all VMware alternatives support both Linux and Windows guest OSes. However, not all VMware alternatives support all available versions of Linux and Windows.

Each DCIG TOP 5 solution offers software that can centrally manage remote deployments.

- 15. Technical support.** Every evaluated VMware alternative provides options to contact and/or obtain technical support. Distributed enterprises may contact or obtain technical support using email or accessing a knowledgebase from nearly every provider. Phone, remote logins, and web forms represent the next three most common technical support options. Over 80 percent of VMware alternative providers minimally make same day technical support available. Most also offer a 1-hour technical support option.
- 16. Web-based management GUI.** All products minimally provide distributed enterprises with a web-based management graphical user interface (GUI) to manage their solution. However, each solution's GUI may differ in terms of its capabilities. For instance, distributed enterprises should verify if the GUI can access, visualize, and manage all installed instances of the solution in their environment. Some may achieve this feat. Other GUIs may require distributed enterprises to enter the IP address of each instance to manage it.

Similarities Between the DCIG TOP 5 VMware Alternatives

In addition to supporting all the features listed above, all DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternatives support the additional following features. These include:

- **24x7x365 technical support with 1 hour or less response time.** Distributed enterprises may need complete confidence that they can reach technical support at any time day or night. Each DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternative provider offers this enterprise level of technical support. Distributed enterprises may access each provider's technical support by email, phone, or via its online knowledgebase. Each provider can also log in to the system for remote problem resolution.
- **Client, data, and user authentications.** Distributed enterprises can expect the DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternatives to have implemented common client and user authentication features. Each of the DCIG TOP 5 solutions support client authentication, multi-factor authentication (MFA), and role-based access controls (RBAC). They also support or comply with HIPAA regulations.
- **Deep support for all Linux and Windows guest OS versions.** While all VMware alternatives support most versions of Linux and Windows guest OSes, the DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternatives support all common versions of them. On the Linux side, the DCIG TOP 5 all support Debian, Fedora, Oracle Linux, Red Hat Enterprise Linux (RHEL), SUSE, and Ubuntu. On the Windows side, they all support Windows 10 and 11 as well as Windows Server 2016, 2019, 2022, and 2025.
- **Fleet management.** The need to centrally manage all VMware alternative deployments has become more pronounced as many distributed enterprises manage distributed IT infrastructures. Each DCIG TOP 5 solution offers software that can centrally manage remote deployments.
- **Software-defined storage.** In addition to SDN, all DCIG TOP 5 solutions support software-defined storage (SDS).
- **Support multiple data protection options.** While all VMware alternatives offer some of mix of their own data protection features, the DCIG TOP 5 solutions all specifically support key features. They all support cloning, asynchronous replication, and VM-level snapshots.
- **Support multiple HA options.** Like data protection, all VMware alternatives offer one or more HA options, with all supporting live migration or failovers. In addition, the DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternatives all support automated multi-site DR.

The distinctions among the DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternatives surface in their support for at least the following four areas: advanced QoS functionality, container technologies, deployment options, and hybrid cloud support.

- **Support multiple SDN features.** Distributed enterprises may also want to use a VMware alternative for their software-defined networking needs. While all VMware alternatives support SDN to some extent, all DCIG TOP 5 solutions offer APIs for integrating third-party network services. Distributed enterprises may also use these SDN features to define, interconnect, and manage virtual networks, define virtual network security, and to support virtual switching.
- **VMware VM and data migrations.** All DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternatives support the following two VMware migration options: agentless migration with no guest OS modifications required and bulk migrations that can concurrently move multiple VMs.

Other features all DCIG TOP 5 solutions also support include:

- **Common task automation**
- **Compression**
- **Education, training, and installation services**
- **Kubernetes orchestration**
- **Persistent storage for containers**
- **Technical support presence in Europe and in North America**
- **Terraform support for infrastructure automation**
- **Thin provisioning**

Distinctions Between the DCIG TOP 5 VMware Alternatives

Despite the multiple similarities between the DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternatives, they also distinguish themselves in the features they support. Since their distinctions outnumber their similarities, distributed enterprises may identify specific features that a solution should possess to meet their specific requirements.

The distinctions among the DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternatives surface in their support for at least the following four areas: advanced Quality-of-Service (QoS) functionality, container technologies, deployment options, and hybrid cloud support. While the DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternatives may support some of these four functions in some capacity, each one implements them differently and perhaps more robustly than the others. Consider:

- **Advanced QoS functionality.** Placing VMs and/or workloads on a specific physical host or cluster may result in performance issues. Identifying which VM or workload causes the issue, when it causes the issue, and how to best resolve the issues quickly gets complicated.

Each DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternative offers some QoS features to help measure, manage, and allocate performance on its platform. However, distributed enterprises that run critical workloads and VMs in their virtualized environments may need more sophisticated QoS features. In this area, distributed enterprises will find the DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternatives differ in their respective feature functionality.

The most supported QoS services available on the DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternatives include:

- Managing to achieve near-zero recovery time objectives (RTOs)
- Monitoring maximum resources allocated to a workload
- Monitoring network QoS
- Orchestration of site recovery tools.

Most VMware alternative providers want to give distributed enterprises the flexibility to deploy their solution in the most affordable manner possible.

Distributed enterprises will find they can only implement gold, silver, or bronze levels of service, manage bursts of IOPs, or VM-centric QoS on one of the VMware alternatives at best, at this time.

- **Container technologies.** Broadcom's decision to make VMware very costly for distributed enterprises to continue using has put them on notice. While distributed enterprises want to move away from VMware, many want to avoid moving from one proprietary hypervisor to another. This has led more to consider how a VMware alternative supports container technologies to give them flexibility going forward.

Each DCIG TOP 5 solution supports container technologies in some capacity. However, the features each one supports vary significantly, with support for Terraform the only commonality.

All the DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternatives in this edition support Kubernetes orchestration and persistent storage. Other supported container technologies supported by four providers include Ansible support, the ability to run both VM and container workloads, a CSI driver, and service mesh support.

- **Deployment options.** Notably, the DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternatives do not share any single commonality in how distributed enterprises may deploy each provider's respective solution. Deploying software on-premises represents the one most commonly supported, with cloud deployment representing the second most supported option.

Most VMware alternative providers want to give distributed enterprises the flexibility to deploy their solution in the most affordable manner possible. However, providers that refrain from software-only options primarily express concerns about supporting too many server hardware versions. Instead, they make their solution available as either an integrated appliance or as an IaaS offering.

Those distributed enterprises that need or want to re-purpose their existing VMware server hardware may not find every DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternative supports that option. While nearly every DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternative offers software, the provider may not certify its software with existing server hardware.

- **Hybrid cloud support.** All DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternatives support a hybrid cloud configuration, which has become almost a prerequisite in today's world. However, how each one implements and supports a hybrid cloud configuration does vary. Notably, Google Cloud Platform and provider-owned clouds represent the most supported options by the DCIG TOP 5 providers. Two providers support AWS and Microsoft Azure, respectively.

When using the cloud to host VMs, they may do so in one of the following ways. Four support bursting workloads to the cloud and offer a hybrid cloud management interface to manage these workloads. Two also support automated failover and automating workload placement between on-premises and the cloud.

Distributed enterprises that want to use the cloud as a cloud storage target will find more providers from which to choose. Four providers each support Amazon S3, Google Cloud Storage, and Microsoft Azure Blob, and three (3) support any S3-compatible cloud object storage.

DCIG TOP 5 VMware Alternative Solution Profiles

Each of the following DCIG TOP 5 VMware alternative solution profiles highlights at least three ways they differentiate themselves from one another. These differentiators represent some of the primary reasons that a distributed enterprise may want to consider one solution over another as a VMware alternative. Within each solution, a distributed enterprise may find specific features that better meet its specific needs.

Zadara offers a pay-as-you-go consumption model that includes all software licenses and the flexibility to choose between month-to-month, multi-year, and fixed pricing contracts.

Zadara zCompute

Zadara delivers zCompute as an infrastructure-as-a-service (IaaS) solution. Zadara includes all hardware and software as part of its solution, which Zadara then fully supports and manages. Distributed enterprises may also access Zadara's 550+ edge cloud sites to create a hybrid IT environment.⁴

Zadara offers a pay-as-you-go consumption model. This model includes all software licenses and gives distributed enterprises the flexibility to choose between month-to-month, multi-year, and fixed pricing contracts.

Additional features that Zadara zCompute offers that help differentiate it from competitive solutions include:

- **A single Zadara cluster can start small and grow to hundreds of nodes.** Distributed enterprises may start with as few as six nodes and grow a single cluster to hundreds of nodes. Minimum system requirements will depend upon workloads in the IT environment. A node must support x86 processors with at least eight CPU cores, 64GB RAM, and 10 GbE network connectivity.⁵

A Zadara cluster can support hardware nodes with differing amounts of compute, storage and GPUs. Distributed enterprises may also automate their deployment via scripting and Infrastructure-as-Code tools such as Terraform, Ansible, and REST APIs.

- **Can burst workloads to the cloud with nominal or no performance degradation.** Bursting workloads to the cloud may raise cost, complexity, and performance concerns. Zadara addresses these concerns by making 550+ remote data centers available worldwide.

This results in a Zadara data center often residing in close geographic proximity to a distributed enterprise's data centers. If bursting into the cloud occurs, workloads then experience little or no performance degradation. Further, Zadara does not possess the technical capability to access any enterprise data to protect it from any unauthorized access. Once in the Zadara Cloud, Zadara follows the same pay-as-you-go model and management framework as on-premises deployments.

- **Offers multiple technologies to optimize storage utilization and control storage costs.** More distributed enterprises have concerns about near-term SSD supply shortages and their rising costs. To address them, Zadara supports HDDs and SSDs and offers multiple storage optimization technologies to maximize available capacity and performance.

Zadara utilizes thin provisioning to ensure storage only gets allocated when data gets written to it. It maximizes available storage capacity by deduplicating and compressing stored data. Finally, it optimizes performance by storing frequently accessed data on SSDs and infrequently accessed data on HDDs.⁶

Distributed enterprises may also use Zadara's backup capabilities to store backups on cloud object storage. Supported cloud providers include Zadara Object Storage, Amazon S3, Azure Blob, Google Cloud Storage, or S3-compatible storage.⁷

Nutanix Cloud Platform represents one of the first VMware Alternatives to integrate with third-party storage arrays, now offering support for Pure Storage FlashArray.

Nutanix Cloud Platform

Nutanix makes its Nutanix Cloud Platform available as a complete software stack for hybrid IT environments. Offering compute, storage, and networking services, distributed enterprises may deploy it across either public or private clouds. Nutanix also offers a Cloud Platform version that gives distributed enterprises a choice of container and hypervisor platforms.⁸

Nutanix makes each of its Cloud Platform versions available through three software licensing options. The Starter Edition includes Cloud Platform's core set of software functionality for small-scale, on-premises deployments and limited workloads. The Pro Edition of Cloud Platform includes more data, management, and resilience services and can run across hybrid environments. The Ultimate Edition of Cloud Platform permits deployment across multiple sites, includes advanced security requirements, and addresses complex IT infrastructures.⁹

Additional features that Nutanix Cloud Platform offers that help differentiate it from competitive solutions include:

- ***Continues to enhance Nutanix Move to facilitate migrations from other hypervisors to the Nutanix AHV hypervisor.*** Available as part of the Nutanix Cloud Platform, Nutanix Move positions distributed enterprises to move from other hypervisors to AHV. Move supports migrations from ESXi, Hyper-V, AWS, and Azure. To move from ESXi to AHV, Move first uses vCenter for inventory collection. It then utilizes vSphere Storage APIs for Data Protection (VADP), the Virtual Disk Development Kit (VDDK), and Changed Block Tracking (CBT) for data migration.¹⁰ Nutanix Move also includes the option to migrate security policies from VMware NSX in VMware Cloud Foundation to Nutanix Flow.¹¹
- ***Expanded support for external storage arrays, beginning with Pure Storage FlashArray.*** Nutanix Cloud Platform represents one of the first VMware Alternatives to integrate with third-party storage arrays. Beginning with Pure Storage FlashArray, distributed enterprises may host a Nutanix VM on a FlashArray volume and achieve per-VM granularity.

Using this functionality, distributed enterprises may apply array services like snapshots and Quality of Service (QoS) at the virtual disk level. Nutanix currently supports the Pure Storage FlashArray//X and FlashArray//XL models with support for FlashArray//C planned.¹²
- ***Offers multiple options to centralize Windows VM deployment.*** Using Nutanix's Guest Customization Profiles, administrators may customize and pre-define Windows guest settings like domain name, password and IP addresses. They then apply these settings during VM creation using Templates and Cloning when managing Windows VMs in mass.¹³ This automatically handles sysprep, domain joins, and IP settings when cloning a VM or deploying a VM from a template.¹⁴
- ***VM Startup Policy permits administrators to define how applications and VMs come back online during startups.*** Nutanix's VM Startup Policy permits administrators to define any dependencies that exist between applications and/or VMs. Then, during high availability events or cluster restarts, VM Startup brings applications back online in the correct order.¹⁵

Red Hat OpenShift provides a consistent application development and management platform across on-premises, public cloud, private cloud, and edge deployments.

Red Hat OpenShift

Red Hat OpenShift delivers a comprehensive enterprise Kubernetes platform that distributed enterprises may use to manage VMs and containerized workloads. It provides a consistent application development and management platform across on-premises, public cloud, private cloud, and edge deployments. This positions it as a strategic VMware alternative for distributed enterprises operating in geographically dispersed environments.

Red Hat includes OpenShift Virtualization as a built-in feature within any OpenShift edition. It offers subscription-based licensing per physical core or physical bare metal node, with all-inclusive terms for predefined periods (annual or multi-year). The platform permits transferring licenses across physical-to-physical (P2P), physical-to-virtual (P2V), virtual-to-physical (V2P), and virtual-to-virtual (V2V) environments.

Notable features that differentiate Red Hat OpenShift from competitive solutions for distributed enterprise environments include:

- **Simplified migration at scale with minimal downtime.** Distributed enterprises require efficient tools to migrate legacy VM workloads without extended outages. Red Hat Migration Toolkit for Virtualization (MTV) addresses this need by enabling automated migrations from VMware vSphere, and other hypervisors.

Distributed enterprises may perform warm migrations using MTV when enabling Change Block Tracking (CBT) on vSphere. This permits MTV to transfer VM data while the guest OS remains operational. The VM then shuts down in vSphere and immediately restarts in OpenShift Virtualization, significantly reducing downtime.

MTV does not alter the source VM in vSphere. Rather, it preserves the source VM as a backup in the event of migration failure. Distributed enterprises may also automate migrations at scale using Red Hat Ansible Automation Platform.

- **Unifies management of VMs and containers across hybrid cloud and edge.** Distributed enterprises increasingly deploy workloads across core data centers and remote edge locations. Using OpenShift Virtualization, IT teams may create, manage, and migrate Linux and Windows VMs using either CLI or UI tools. Further, they may use these same tools to manage both VMs and containerized applications.

Built on the open source KubeVirt project and KVM hypervisor, OpenShift Virtualization can perform multiple types of migrations. For example, it can migrate VMs between nodes, management of network interface controllers, and storage disks attached to VMs.

This unified approach eliminates the need for separate management frameworks. Rather, it positions distributed enterprises to modernize legacy workloads while preserving existing virtualization investments.

- **Flexible deployment models with managed cloud services.** Distributed enterprises often require both self-managed and fully managed infrastructure options. Red Hat offers self-managed OpenShift editions for on-premises and edge deployments. Distributed enterprises can also opt for fully managed OpenShift cloud services that Red Hat and its public cloud partners operate. Managed services site reliability engineering (SRE) teams maintain core services and infrastructure, reducing operational overhead for distributed IT teams.

Scale Computing SC//HyperCore's enhanced node lifecycle management equips distributed enterprises to scale Scale Computing cluster on demand, modernize existing hardware, and even shrink existing clusters.

Scale Computing Platform™ edge computing solution

2025 represented a significant year for Scale Computing in many respects. Aside from continuing to introduce more features into its SC//Platform, Scale Computing was acquired by Acumera.¹⁶ Now alongside SC//Platform, distributed enterprises may obtain and deploy Scale Computing's AcuVigil™ managed network services for 24/7 network operations support with self-service visibility and control.

To better compete against VMware and meet the needs of price-conscious organizations, Scale Computing introduced the following two licensing tiers.

- **Standard.** This tier includes Scale Computing's baseline SC//HyperCore™ virtualization suite and software-defined storage functionality.
- **Professional.** Scale Computing designed this tier for distributed enterprises that require advanced features such as replication and GPU virtualization.¹⁷

Distributed enterprises with smaller sites may also obtain Standard and Professional licenses available in Essential Kit Pricing in packages of up to three (3) nodes.

Other notable feature enhancements that Scale Computing made to its SC//Platform that help differentiate it from competitive solutions include:

- **Agentless backups of SC//HyperCore available using Veeam Backup and Replication.** More distributed enterprises require that a VMware alternative be supported by an enterprise backup software solution. Scale Computing has met this requirement for some time, but has made it easier for distributed enterprises to achieve this objective. Distributed enterprises may now perform agentless backups of SC//HyperCore using Veeam Backup and Replication.

Using Veeam, distributed enterprises can perform agentless backups of SC//HyperCore instances from the data center to the edge.¹⁸ Veeam also gives distributed enterprises access to other modern backup features that they may require. These features include VM backups and recoveries, immutable backups, and a choice of cloud, object, and tape targets. They may even use it to migrate workloads from VMware vSphere to SC//HyperCore.¹⁹

- **Non-disruptively grow, modernize, or shrink SC//HyperCore clusters.** Scale Computing introduced enhanced node lifecycle management into its SC//HyperCore software virtualization platform to address the ongoing challenges of cluster management. IT staff may add new nodes, replace aging hardware, or delete a node without interrupting workloads. Distributed enterprises may then scale on demand, replace or update existing hardware, and even shrink existing clusters.²⁰
- **More options for centralized using REST APIs, a Terraform provider, and full application lifecycle management.** Distributed enterprises with hundreds, thousands or even tens of thousands of sites often want tools to automate hypervisor and VM management. To meet these requirements, Scale Computing updated its SC//HyperCore REST APIs, introduced a Terraform provider, and expanded its SC//Fleet Manager™ edge orchestration software to provide full application lifecycle management..

Using REST APIs, distributed enterprises may create specific accounts that can only perform certain tasks. They may include backups or viewing or monitoring the SC//HyperCore UI. Alternatively, distributed enterprises may create administrative accounts that can use REST APIs to create, delete or modify VMs.²¹

Distributed enterprises that use Terraform should find the Scale Computing provider to meet many of or all their requirements. They may use the Terraform provider to create VMs, power them on or off, and resize and delete VMs. They may also use the provider to attach or remove virtual disks, configure networking, manage replication, and orchestrate snapshots.²²

SoftIron HyperCloud manages each node in an ephemeral manner. It only assigns a node its compute or storage capacity configuration when a workload initiates.

SoftIron HyperCloud

SoftIron delivers HyperCloud as a complete software stack for hybrid IT environments. SoftIron initially designed HyperCloud as a software-defined storage (SDS) offering before introducing compute into HyperCloud. HyperCloud then scales by adding more nodes into a cluster.²³

SoftIron licenses HyperCloud under an all-inclusive software licensing model. Its software license covers all hardware, SoftIron's entire software stack, and SoftIron support and maintenance. SoftIron primarily delivers HyperCloud as a turnkey solution that includes both hardware and software for on-premises deployments.²⁴ It also supports bursting workloads into the AWS cloud.²⁵

Additional features that SoftIron HyperCloud offers that help differentiate it from competitive solutions include:

- **Delivers all HyperCloud nodes in a one rack unit (1RU) form factor.** SoftIron seeks to minimize HyperScale's datacenter footprint and avoid the complexity of supporting hardware from multiple providers. To do so, distributed enterprises may only obtain HyperScale nodes from SoftIron that ship in a 1U form factor.

SoftIron does make HyperScale nodes available in multiple hardware configurations to meet varying workload requirements. On the compute side, nodes ship optimized for general purpose, high performance, and task accelerated workloads. On the storage capacity side, nodes ship optimized for density (HDDs), performance (SSD flash), and performance plus (NVMe flash). SoftIron or its partners work with distributed enterprises to first document their workload requirements and then ship them appropriately configured nodes.²⁶

- **Dynamically utilizes and changes how it uses a node within a cluster.** Within a HyperCloud cluster, each node currently offers either compute or storage capacity services. Further, HyperCloud manages each node in an ephemeral manner. It only assigns a node its compute or storage capacity configuration when a workload initiates.

When a workload spins down, HyperCloud releases the node's compute or storage capacity assignment and resources. The node then goes back into the HyperCloud cluster resource pool to await its next workload assignment and configuration.²⁷

- **Offers free software tool to facilitate VM migrations from VMware to HyperCloud.** To migrate VMware VMs to HyperCloud, SoftIron offers its Catalyst software import tool. The Catalyst tool can migrate any VM that meet the following three conditions:
 - It has SSH access to an ESXi host.
 - The VM does not have any snapshots.
 - The VM only uses storage on basic Virtual Machine File System datastores as virtual machine disk images (VMDKs).

Distributed enterprises may then transition from VMware vCenter to SoftIron's VM Squared once they have completed migrating VMware VMs to HyperCloud.²⁸

VMware Alternative Inclusion Criteria

In considering solutions for inclusion in this report, a solution must meet the following criteria:

- Offers a virtualization solution for compute, networking and storage with a hypervisor.
- Intended for use by distributed enterprises that satisfy the characteristics described in the sidebar in this report.
- May be software-only that runs on standard server hardware or select OEM server platforms.
- May be a pre-integrated appliance that includes all needed hardware and software.
- May be an IaaS solution that includes all needed hardware, software, and technical support.
- Shipping and available by January 1, 2026.
- Sufficient information is available for DCIG to make an informed, defensible decision.

DCIG Disclosures

Providers of some of the VMware alternatives covered in this DCIG TOP 5 report are or have been DCIG clients. In that vein, here is some background to keep in mind when considering the information contained in this DCIG TOP 5 report:

- No provider paid DCIG a fee to research this topic or arrive at predetermined conclusions.
- DCIG did not guarantee any provider that its solution would be included in this DCIG TOP 5 report.
- DCIG did not imply or guarantee that a specific solution would receive a DCIG TOP 5 designation.
- All research is based upon publicly available information, information shared by the provider, and the expertise of those evaluating the information.
- DCIG conducted no hands-on testing to validate how or if the features worked as described.
- No negative inferences should be made against any provider or solution not covered in this DCIG TOP 5 report.
- It is a misuse of this DCIG TOP 5 report to compare solutions included in this report against solutions not included in it.

No provider was privy to how DCIG weighted individual features. In every case the provider only found out the rankings of its solution after the analysis was complete. To arrive at the DCIG TOP 5 solutions included in this report, DCIG followed a seven-step process to reach the most objective conclusions possible.

1. DCIG established which features would be evaluated.
2. The features were grouped into five general categories.
3. DCIG weighted each feature to establish a scoring rubric.
4. DCIG identified solutions that met DCIG's definition for a VMware alternative solution.
5. A survey was completed for software or a pre-integrated appliance (hardware + software) competitor to VMware.
6. DCIG evaluated each VMware alternative solution based on information gathered in its survey.
7. Solutions were ranked using standard scoring techniques. ■

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