

AWS Partner Story: How Branch Insurance Unlocked a Dedicated Serverless Software Team in Stackery



Executive Summary

Branch Insurance offers a thoroughly contemporary approach to the oft-outdated insurance industry with bundled home, renter and automotive coverage, low costs, and community support. While consumers have a deluge of options for their coverage today, Branch believes the field is broken. The company's practical solutions address the truth that most providers have forgotten why insurance exists: to make real people feel more taken care of in their daily lives.

Because Branch's business model is radically modern and lean, the software architecture powering it needed to be equally so. With the majority of their engineering team bringing front-end AWS experience, Branch wanted a solution that minimized the amount of code-writing and maximized efficiency so they could focus on delivering a meaningful product to customers.

When they found this solution in serverless, the need for an entirely separate team with deep operational AWS serverless expertise became clear. Stackery delivers this expertise so Branch engineers can focus on creating a best-in-class insurance experience.

An AWS Backbone

When Branch's co-founder and CTO Joe Emison first founded Branch, he intentionally hired engineers with a lot of AWS frontend experience. This decision came from a desire to keep the people building Branch close to its customers -- an imperative for a company serving people a human vision of home and auto insurance.

Before hiring, Emison chiefly utilized scripts running AWS CLI calls to build Branch's stacks. While he was comfortable with this workflow, his growing team of engineers lacked the same level of expertise with those tools. As a company leader, Emison didn't have the bandwidth to be a silo and instead began to explore other options that his team was comfortable working with. Namely, AWS CloudFormation.

"The best thing about Amazon Web Services (AWS) is that there are so many tools and they have all been iteratively built in response to customer demand," says Emison. "We share this vision at Branch for our own product and our engineers have a lot of AWS knowledge. It made sense to listen to those actually building Branch when designing our architecture."

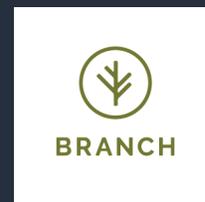
To Rebuild Or Not to Rebuild?

With AWS in place, Branch was set up for success. But it remained a priority for Emison that the team didn't spend time building new software without a demonstrable reason.

"In terms of time management, my view is that software teams should use existing architecture instead of building new solutions. This is especially true of our industry because there is a lot of preexisting software in each sector that mattered to us such as claims, profile-building, and more.

When we were ideating Branch, I wanted to justify why we shouldn't just purchase software packages that were ready to go. If we had to build it ourselves, could that be done in a way without incinerating endless time coding?"

About Branch Insurance



Branch insurance was founded in 2017 by former Allstate and Esurance executive Steve Lekas and Joe Emison, founder of BuildFax to make insurance better and more affordable for all. With community-centered solutions like rapid claim filing, truly bundled plans, and modern benefits like ride and home-sharing coverage, Branch is changing the way humans insure their lives.

Branch insurance is underwritten by General Security National Insurance Company (GSNIC) an AM Best A+ Financial Rated insurance company.

The Serverless Answer

Emison approached the organization of Branch's software architecture by first defining what the most successful software teams look like in the first place. The team arrived at several key capabilities: frequent release to production, ability to roll back often, and software delivery many times faster than the average cycle.

"Any time people in my position are evaluating architecture, it's imperative that they focus on those *writing* the software in question," says Emison. "One of the biggest priorities for my team was eliminating the time suck of running our own code."

Given its inherent scalability and rapid deployment, AWS serverless was the clear best path for Branch.

Stackery: A Serverless Plugin for Team Efficiency

After the team arrived at this decision, they quickly discovered that a preexisting familiarity with AWS was not enough to define infrastructure in a flow that Branch's engineers knew, understood, and were satisfied with.

"Shocker: software developers want to write software and get it out there. They don't want to do muck around with scientific experiments," said Emison.

Contributing to that initial "science experiment" frustration was AWS CloudFormation:

"AWS CloudFormation is hard," explains Emison. "Most organizations we knew of had to build significant tooling to make it truly function in conjunction with their applications — and we turned to serverless to *save* us time."

After connecting with Stackery at ServerlessConf in 2018, Branch signed up to extend the AWS serverless knowledge of their team

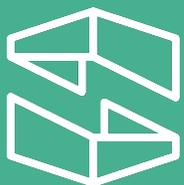
Results

Branch was able to carry their work over to Stackery, highlight their own knowledge gaps, and get professional CloudFormation assistance from a live knowledge bank of AWS serverless.

"Stackery essentially granted our organization a team of skilled, serverless-specific engineers that I don't have to professionally manage"

With the help of Stackery's environment and deployment abstractions, Branch was also able to establish a highly organized and consistent control environment. This quickly helped the company achieve SOC 2 compliance; a critical achievement that establishes Branch as a SaaS company that officially accords with strict regulatory information security policies to protect its customers' data.

Stackery continues to save Branch's software engineering team significant time and offers an ongoing support network for the elements of AWS serverless that aren't intuitive. This frees the entire team up to build amazing apps, like the ones that contribute to the company's new humanitarian project, SafetyNest™, which gives the uninsured the help they need.



About Stackery

Stackery was founded by former New Relic and GitHub leaders to enable software developers and operations teams to quickly and confidently compose, deploy, and manage applications built on managed cloud services. The company was named a "2019 Company To Watch" by SDTimes, is an Amazon Advanced Technology Partner, and is backed by Hummer Winblad Ventures and Voyager Capital. Learn more at [Stackery.io](https://stackery.io) or on Twitter at [@stackeryio](https://twitter.com/stackeryio)