

Secure, Accessible GPU Instances Unleash Millions of Adventurers

Akamai helps Hero Forge allow tabletop gamers to design and 3D-print custom figurines



Tabletop gaming allows players to engage their imaginations and create fantasy worlds in which their unique characters embark on epic adventures. The boring, gray, injection-molded figurines of the past were begging for an upgrade, and 3D-printing technology made it possible – aided by some passionate and ingenious engineers and designers.

Soon after they started playing a tabletop RPG campaign together, a few of these imaginative engineers and designers came up with the idea for Hero Forge and its umbrella company, Sky Castle Studios. Originally, it was just an idea to keep them busy over the winter and delight their friends with custom figurines – and now they operate a development studio with 3.8 million registered users and 40 full-time employees that offers various customized products.

Hero Forge allows tabletop gamers to design, customize, share, and 3D-print unique tabletop miniatures and statuettes from their web browser using in-depth character creator tools. It was developed and tested through a progression of Kickstarter campaigns, gauging interest in each innovation through a series of fundraisers. In addition to full production capabilities, Hero Forge now has an API that enables users



Hero Forge

San Francisco, California
heroforge.com

Industry

High Tech

Solution

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to take their character to other websites that host virtual tabletop games, or even video games, free of charge.

Cloud GPU comparisons point to Akamai

David Lenna, co-founder and CTO, spent eight years at South Park Studios, including a stint as its CTO. He also has impressive special effects credentials, working on films like King Kong (2005) and James Cameron's Avatar. With strong design, programming, and infrastructure backgrounds, Lenna and the rest of the Hero Forge team wanted the freedom to work with their code in ways hyperscalers wouldn't allow. They also performed a cost analysis, which proved that Akamai's cloud computing services (formerly Linode) were the right choice – and they've been a customer since 2013.

"A rock-solid local network and strong VMs make Akamai work for us," Lenna said. "Now we're using the more advanced services. I'm impressed with the live migration setup. We have a large and active database of over 70 million saved miniatures that are about 100 KB each. Linode [now Akamai] makes a perfect copy of our data every time, and although we've never needed the backup, it's nice to know it's there."

GPUs play an essential role for Hero Forge, making users' creations possible. Akamai data centers in Atlanta, Georgia, and Newark, New Jersey, are used for GPUs and object storage. Lenna shared that he spent six months researching the benefits of leasing a rack to run GPU instances. He compared five different providers' security, access, expansion capability, and other key factors. Lenna discovered that it was more affordable to use Akamai GPU instances. Plus, he could get the permanent SSH tunnel that he needed.



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– David Lenna,
Co-Founder and CTO, Hero Forge

“Because Akamai offers a raw Linux instance, we’ve found it extremely flexible,” Lenna said. “You can instantiate and write services that do what you need them to do without having to be sold some extra service. The backbone is so fast, and the NFS (Network File Service) is so reliable, we’ve been able to custom build exactly what we need for the millions of miniatures we need to store.”

The Hero Forge team deeply understands Linux machines and recommends Akamai to others with the same understanding. The team is just getting acquainted with Akamai’s other services, such as managed Kubernetes. The easy teardown and simple setup to fit their needs have been fun relearning experiences for this inventive team, who plan to keep growing and innovating on the cloud as their own adventures continue.



Hero Forge is a platform that lets you design and order custom tabletop miniatures and statuettes. Gone are the days of having to root through poorly stocked shelves or pore over low-resolution image galleries to find your perfect mini: Now you can design it from the ground up with this innovative platform built on GPUs from Akamai’s cloud computing services.

heroforge.com