

# How Airtime Rewards transformed their approach to infrastructure

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## Summary

Airtime Rewards uses cutting-edge transactional technology to offer a seamless retail rewards experience for high-street brands and their customers. Its infrastructure team aims to follow a similarly advanced approach, and Spacelift has elevated the experience for them. As their director of technology Gareth Lowe puts it, "Spacelift has fundamentally changed how we think about infrastructure — for the better."

## Company size

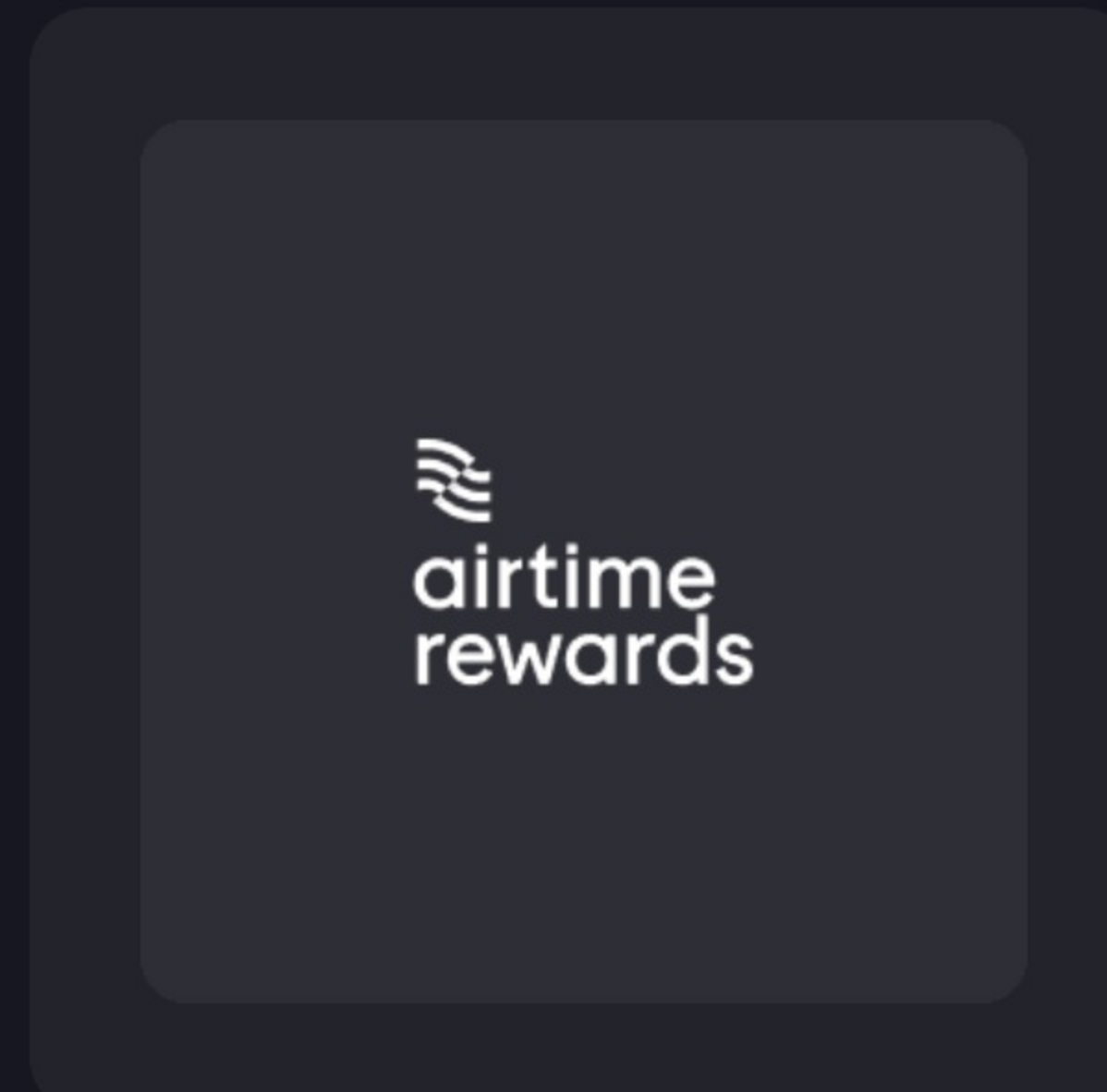
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## Engineering team size

20

## Stack

Backend: PHP, AWS (Lambda, RDS, DynamoDB), Docker



Spacelift gives Airtime Rewards a far more affordable alternative for managing Terraform, CI/CD features, enhanced controls, and other functions.



As a fintech with strict compliance and security requirements, Airtime Rewards appreciates how Spacelift policies enable them to leverage the benefits of CI/CD but with guardrails.



Spacelift gives Airtime Rewards an auditable, single source of truth by defining and documenting configuration settings in one set of centralized files.

The Airtime Rewards team started to look at alternative Terraform vendors when the cost of their existing service became untenable. It was only then they discovered just how much more they could be doing with their infrastructure as code (IaC). We spoke to Lead Automation Engineer Bertie Blackman, Director of Technology Gareth Lowe, Observability Practice Lead Mike Corlett, and Automation Engineer Muhammed Ali about the difference Spacelift has made to their IaC experience.

## The challenge for Airtime Rewards

The infrastructure team at Airtime Rewards wasn't necessarily dissatisfied with their existing Terraform experience. "It wasn't terrible," Mike Corlett, the company's observability practice lead, concedes. "The interface and the experience weren't that good, but it wasn't until we experienced Spacelift, that we realized there was something much better out there."

Cost was the key driver of Airtime Rewards' move from their existing vendor. As the team scaled and their ambitions for Terraform grew, the sheer expense of using it for what they wanted to do became unfeasible. "We were using Terraform purely for state, but as we grew, we wanted to get CI/CD features, better controls, and other functions; but the quote we received was very high," recalls Gareth Lowe, Airtime Rewards' director of technology.

Gareth had been introduced to Spacelift while working at another company, so the platform was a natural option to explore when his infrastructure team was investigating alternative IaC management options at Airtime Rewards. They scheduled a demo with Spacelift and were impressed with what they saw.

## Why Airtime Rewards chose Spacelift

As a company that handles payment card information, Airtime Rewards is governed by strict policies and procedures to optimize the security of card transactions and safeguard cardholders. These include the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS), which is designed to establish and maintain a secure environment for clients and means much of the company's infrastructure must be policy-driven.

The key attraction for Spacelift for Gareth was the fact that "we could still have the CI/CD goodness, but we could put in guardrails. We didn't have to depend on humans to do approvals; we could just move as fast as we needed to." This is because Spacelift makes heavy use of the policy-as-code engine [Open Policy Agent](#), which allows you to codify your rules and decision-making to execute them in an automated way.

Peace of mind for a company working with sensitive financial data was a key reason for adopting the Spacelift platform, but it wasn't the only one. The quality of the product and the support behind it really clinched the deal. Recalling the demo, Mike remembers that "we got things working with at least one build very, very quickly. It was out-of-the-box working and that gave us the confidence that it was a good solution. And the Spacelift Slack channel was a big win for you as well. I think there were 16 people from Spacelift on that channel from day one, so you were able to answer questions really, really quickly. And you're still there today."

## Airtime Rewards' Spacelift experience

From a promising start, the relationship between Airtime Rewards and Spacelift has continued to progress. "It's been pretty much plain sailing, so far — configuration of stacks and just getting used to the tool are fairly straightforward out of the box," says automation engineer Muhammed Ali.

Spacelift's emphasis on self-service was a key factor in the smooth onboarding process. Gareth cites the data team's experience as an example. "All the team are in Google Cloud, and they've shipped everything over to Spacelift themselves, with Muhammed's help." Airtime Rewards works on the basis of pull requests, and the fact that Spacelift also integrates that way streamlines the process of making changes.

Naturally, things get more difficult with more complex use cases. "It's only when you have to do things like configure the stacks to talk to each other that you encounter pain points," explains Muhammed. But even when solutions do not seem particularly straightforward, help is at hand. "When you ask in the [Slack] channel, someone will always say 'Yeah, we've got this feature coming out', so there's always fast feedback."

Mike recalls an example of what Muhammed is talking about. "There was no integration with Datadog, but there was a hack we implemented — and then Spacelift implemented the Datadog integration within a month, and it felt like it was implemented for us!"

## Spacelift's impact on Airtime Rewards

Now, Spacelift operates as the team's single source of truth. This is one of the most powerful outcomes of successful IaC. It delivers that auditable, single source of truth by defining and documenting your configuration settings in one set of centralized files. "I can see exactly what's deployed, so if someone comes to me and tells me something is broken, I can check a stack, run it, make sure there's no drift — and it works," says Muhammed.

Gareth goes further, pointing out that "Spacelift has fundamentally changed how we think about infrastructure — for the better. It used to be this big scary thing that you did all in command lines, but as Muhammed said, it comes back to that source of truth, and that's really changed the equation because I remember doing it the old school way, and it was a horrible experience. Whereas now, it's really smooth. It's really easy."

That ease of use translates into productivity gains. "Spacelift has probably saved us literally thousands of hours of work because it's just that easy," Muhammed reveals. "I can open a merge request, write my code changes, and there you go — Spacelift has done the planning for me. I can visualize everything, and I don't have to think twice or three times about what I'm doing because I can see it in front of me." These time savings become even more valuable in a scaling organization like Airtime Rewards, where infrastructure can grow in complexity at a dizzying rate. "We've got more than 50 stacks set up in Spacelift. Looking after all of that manually across different projects and different code repositories would be painful," says Muhammed.

For an organization operating in such a highly regulated industry, adopting a new approach to IaC is not a decision to take lightly. But it's one that Airtime Rewards has no regrets about.

"We made the decision with a little trepidation, but looking retrospectively, it's been absolutely worth that price of admission to get Spacelift in place," Gareth concludes.

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