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Material+

Material meets its people where they are

When Material – a strategy, insights, design and technology partner to companies striving for true customer-centricity – brought together 12 separate legal entities through mergers and acquisitions, it wanted to provide its employees with a modern workplace experience that encourages collaboration while maintaining access to the technologies its people were most comfortable with. Achieving this goal involved consolidating the authentication of its 1,500+ employees with a single sign-in under the Material brand.

To learn more about this process from Material's vantage point, we spoke to Brad Bazley, the company's senior vice president, information technology. He had lots of great insights to share.

Q: What were some of the challenges that led to this identity consolidation initiative?

A: Bazley: It's important to note that this project wasn't launched in response to any sort of problems that arose unexpectedly. This was a carefully planned part of Material's journey that our Digital Workplace team anticipated as we started bringing multiple companies together. Like so many others in our shoes, we were starting from a base of conventional technology needing to embrace acquisitions that were born and live in the cloud. Additionally, we came together right at the onset of COVID-19, so our need to work together seamlessly was compounded with the need to do so remotely.

Q: With some of your acquisitions working on the Microsoft platform and others working on Google, did you consider just moving all your new entities to one common platform?

A: Bazley: No. We knew immediately that we didn't want to say, "Everyone will come to work on this technology platform or that technology platform." We recognized the importance of meeting our teams where they are, using the systems they use and what works for them.

For many teams, these weren't just legacy technologies they were using – the platform was inherent to the way they work. Some teams built their processes, client relationships and businesses around them. We had to respect the way our people work to preserve the value of the teams we were bringing together.

Q: How did you build your consolidation strategy?

A: Bazley: Our Digital Workplace team was acutely focused on three main things: modernization, integration and consolidation. In simpler terms, we needed to get our cloud systems working together, get all the separate entities able to communicate with one another and get to work as one company, safely and securely in a changed landscape. Microsoft Azure Active Directory was the perfect solution for our needs.

Q: Why did you pick Avanade as your trusted partner for this project?

A: Bazley: Avanade came highly regarded from Microsoft. In determining who was the right partner, we wanted one who could collaborate with all the players, both internally and with well-regarded partners that were supporting us on the Google side. We looked to Microsoft to see who that might be and they recommended Avanade.

Q: With such a complex project, how did you handle any challenges that arose?

A: Bazley: The number of variables in play was more than we could plan for from day one, so our head of digital workplace, Glen Durmas, resolved whatever the day one issue was, and whatever the cause, we were going to throw ourselves into resolving it. That level of hyper care was critical. A perfect change management program was not possible due to the sheer amount of change, so we remained incredibly available and invested in the change together with our people. Our availability, presence and responsiveness distinguished our team in this program, making it a success.

Q: How has this project improved the modern workplace experience for your employees?

A: Bazley: Fundamentally, we can do things faster with less effort. For example, when someone needs a new distribution list or shared mailbox set up, we can deliver it immediately. There's been a huge impact on support times, with the helpdesk resolving requests twice as fast as before because we're working on a single set of systems; no more hunting from system to system. We're now able to move away from a lot of manual work and effort through automation and meaningful self-service packages that are delivered securely and in a verifiable way. These improvements have had a positive impact on customer satisfaction, because a more efficient workplace experience doesn't just mean more satisfied users, it means our people can deliver for our customers faster as well.

Q: You mentioned security. Have you seen results on that front as well?

A: Bazley: Yes. We've achieved significant increases in security scoring compared to typical companies thanks to this consolidation effort. We've had a 47% increase in our Microsoft Secure Score, now sitting at 9% above the benchmark and climbing steadily as we continue to improve on our combined systems.

Q: How did your trusted partnership with Avanade contribute to a successful outcome?

A: Bazley: Avanade was there for Glen, the team and I for the whole process. Implicit in the scope of the project was that we had other vendors involved as well, and we really relied on Avanade to take the architectural lead and support us with internal discussions. We always had a clear idea and path forward when challenges arose, and having a close partnership at all levels – executive, program management and technical – meant that when things were observed on the ground, they got very fast, responsive attention.

Q: Any other thoughts you'd like to share?

A: Bazley: Programs like this cannot succeed without the trust and support of your people. I'm immensely grateful to Material's people and leaders for their belief in, and commitment to, this program on both the successful and tough days. Taking nearly a year to reach the finish line, the Digital Workplace team could feel the cheering and support from the sidelines of their colleagues, and I believe this was critical to the team delivering the outcomes we've discussed. Most importantly, I want to recognize the entire Material IT community, and our Digital Workplace team specifically, for all they gave to make this program a success and our vision a reality.

About Avanade

Avanade is the leading provider of innovative digital, cloud and advisory services, industry solutions and design-led experiences across the Microsoft ecosystem. Every day, our 56,000 professionals in 26 countries make a genuine human impact for our clients, their employees and their customers. Avanade was founded in 2000 by Accenture LLP and Microsoft Corporation. Learn more at www.avanade.com

About Material

Material is a global strategy, insights, design, and technology partner to companies striving for true customer-centricity and ongoing relevance in a digital first, customer-led world. By leveraging proprietary, science based tools that enable human understanding, we inform and create customer-centric business models and experiences + deploy measurement systems - to build transformational relationships between businesses and the people they serve.

Learn more at materialplus.io.