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Time for change: Making the leap from Office 2007 to the cloud

How Siemens cracked the complexity of a massive, secure workplace migration in record time

When Siemens committed to a cloud-first strategy, it faced a daunting task. It had to find a way to move around 380,000 employees in thousands of locations around the world to its new Microsoft 365 platform without disrupting business or compromising its security. Once there, it had to make sure that employees could easily access and benefit from the full suite of tools now available to help them be more productive, efficient and collaborative. The scale and complexity of this project would be no small feat.

To find out how Siemens accomplished its cloud migration successfully and securely in just two years, we spoke with Thomas Müller-Lynch, global Microsoft 365 implementation program lead at Siemens.
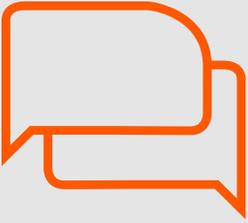
Q: Can you start by describing the Siemens company culture as it pertains to your employees?

A: Siemens is really an industry company with 380,000 employees and a diverse project portfolio. If you look at this huge portfolio, we have a very diverse employee setup. Due to the non-homogenous structure of Siemens, you will see all the complexity that we have in the company when we brought Office 365 with all its services and security to the company internally.

Q: What triggered this workplace modernization and how did the transformation align with your innovation strategy?

A: In general, we strongly believe in cloud and see that as a strategy for Siemens. We believe it gives us flexibility, standard services and also positive cost benefits in some areas. We had a situation that for different reasons, we were still using Windows 7, Office 2007 or 2010 and Exchange 2010. They were either not supported or were at the end of their extended support. When deciding to either renew our on-premises contract or move to the cloud, we realized that we wanted to participate in a world that is constantly updating and avoid any big update projects.

We want to be and always stay up to date. That led to a clear focus and goal to replace Office 2007 with the newest version and move all mailboxes to the cloud. And since we had a contract for all the other Office 365 services, why not use them too. That's when we implemented the other out-of-the-box services.

Q: How did you prepare for this migration and overcome any time constraints you faced given the size and scale of your operations?

A: That's why we selected Avanade. Right before we started the Office 365 program, we had a huge Active Directory consolidation, where we learned how to work in such a large, complex enterprise. We already knew that preparation and transparency were key. Otherwise, pushing around 380,000 mailboxes to the cloud in a traditional way would be endless.

We reused the same methodology and experiences from the Active Directory project when migrating to Office 365. We built up a database, known aptly as mission control. We then categorized all the different data Siemens had so we could migrate those that were ready and block those that were not due to issues like network, legal and communication restrictions or compatibility issues. Once we had those processes in place, we could finally select batches of 10,000, 15,000 or 20,000 people per week and move them to the cloud. Doing it another way would create too much noise and damage to the company and would disturb people too much.

We also discovered that you have different perceptions or expectations from the various groups within Siemens, and we needed to find a way to make everyone happy. We considered this when creating the best user experience for all.

Q: What was the biggest change as a result of this migration?

A: From an end-user perspective, we changed how employees can connect to the Office environment. Together with our Cybersecurity department, we changed how data and services can be used. In the past, we "just" had mobile email for 160,000 users. Now it's not only Exchange, but we also have access to other online service tools and Microsoft apps. The integration of various services and the resulting productivity in combination with a much more flexible way to access data is the major change for Siemens employees.
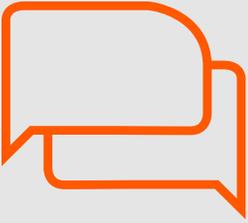
Q: You talked about the issue of security. What is the premise and importance of the Charter of Trust and how did you ensure that this project adhered to the standards you set forth in the initiative?

A: At an executive level, the [Charter of Trust] is about trust and security, which we signed with customers and other units. As you can imagine, if you position yourself in an open and stringent way, then you have to make security first in all of your activities. Security must be considered a very important and intrinsic step in everything we do. Together with Avanade, we understood what this means, especially given the size of Siemens. We invested a lot to protect the security of the migration environment, ensuring that our data in the cloud is protected in a proper way.

Q: What impact will this newly empowered workforce have on your business and how will it help you continue to be a leading innovator in your industry?

A: We have taken the first step to upgrade our basic infrastructure to those new platforms and new services. The next step is to get the benefit out of those new services. If you look deeper, you find there is all this artificial intelligence which is not yet widely used at Siemens. But we believe these tools will be key to the future workplace, improving our employee productivity and ultimately making a positive impact on our business.

If you consider a new Office just as a new version of the old one, you may ask where is the benefit? But if you integrate the other things, you see how easy and fast it can be to implement those new technologies.

Q: What made Avanade a great partner for this project?

A: First, Avanade brought in their A-team, who supported us in making the right decisions. As we are a big company, we needed a partner that also has some size and experience to adapt when unexpected issues arose. That's why I was happy with Avanade. It's their commitment and how they reacted when things did not go as expected. But it was also their positive support in delivering the right thing at the right time.

Q: What about this project and its success are you most proud of?

A: For us, the size of Siemens was always key. We are not a small company and to move a consolidated public cloud platform is a real challenge. It's not easy to manage, but we aspired to consider business continuity and user happiness. I'm proud that we were able to manage the complexity and, at the same time, achieve our goals in a short amount of time – just two years, one of which was the actual migration, at more than 10,000 mailboxes a week. Those are huge numbers.

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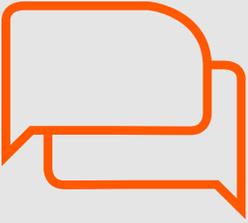
About Siemens

Siemens AG (Berlin and Munich is a global technology powerhouse that has stood for engineering excellence, innovation, quality, reliability and internationality for more than 170 years. The company is active around the globe, focusing on the areas of the intelligent infrastructure for buildings and distributed energy systems, and automation and digitalization in the process and manufacturing industries. Through the separately managed companies Siemens Energy, the global energy business of Siemens, and Siemens Mobility, a leading supplier of smart mobility solutions for rail and road transport, Siemens is shaping the energy systems of today and tomorrow as well as the world market for passenger and freight services. Due to its majority stakes in the publicly listed companies Siemens Healthineers AG and Siemens Gamesa Renewable Energy (as part of Siemens Energy), Siemens is also a world-leading supplier of medical technology and digital healthcare services as well as environmentally friendly solutions for onshore and offshore wind power generation. In fiscal 2019, which ended on September 30, 2019, Siemens generated revenue of €86.8 billion and net income of €5.6 billion. At the end of September 2019, the company had around 385,000 employees worldwide. Further information is available on the Internet at www.siemens.com.