

Avanade's all-up cloud push boosts business value

The company benefits from new technologies, and saves millions of dollars a year. Even better: IT invests in everyone's success.

Would you trust a cloud services provider that wasn't living, breathing proof of the business benefits of cloud computing? Over the past three years, Avanade has walked the walk on cloud strategy—moving nearly 90 percent of its business applications to the cloud, up from 27 percent in 2012—and it shows. The company avoids massive datacenter deployment projects and puts new technology to use up to 18 months faster. It's reducing infrastructure costs and eliminating significant efforts previously spent on upgrading platforms. It's reinvesting the savings in delivering greater business value for internal customers and clients—like you.

“Avanade's cloud strategy is all about helping the company to become a truly digital business that operates with greater agility, a greater focus on adding business value, and a greater ability to manage costs.”
– Chris Miller, Chief Information Officer, Avanade

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Situation

Avanade is no stranger to the cloud. But only until a few years ago, Avanade's use of the cloud was relatively modest. In 2012, just 27 percent of its internal business applications were delivered over the cloud. Did it matter? Avanade decided that it very much did.

The same factors affecting many of its clients were affecting the company itself: the accelerating pace of technology changes and a growing array of cloud based SaaS, PaaS, and IaaS options allowed Avanade to achieve

- Greater agility
- More strategic use of IT resources
- Reduced costs and improved expense management.

The cloud promised to deliver all three—if it was done right.

And of course, Avanade had an added reason to want to accelerate its cloud strategy: By moving to the cloud, Avanade has learned invaluable lessons and best practices to use in helping its clients gain the biggest benefit from their own cloud migration strategies.

Solution

Avanade is unlikely to run 100 percent of its applications in the cloud in the very near future. "We take a hybrid approach to the cloud at Avanade," says Eric Cameron, Director of Hosting and Collaboration within Avanade's Information Technology Services (ITS) group. "We can benefit from running most apps in the cloud, but for now there are also compelling reasons to run some apps in our data centers, or for hybrid deployments that span the datacenter and the cloud."

One of the principles that Rafat Naqvi, VP of Enterprise Applications, and her colleagues have used to guide their cloud strategy and its deployment is Avanade's model of IT as a services broker. In this model, IT utilizes the optimal combination of external service providers and internally developed and maintained solutions to provide world class information technology for Avanade.

To the cloud: Office 365

In 2013, Avanade started plans to upgrade its deployment of their broadly used Microsoft SharePoint platform for intranet, extranet, and its public-facing website. The last major SharePoint upgrade had

a \$1 million price tag and took a year to implement – an experience no one wanted to repeat.

Fortunately, this time Avanade had an alternative – Microsoft Office 365 includes SharePoint Online. In 2014, Avanade kicked off its phased implementation of Office 365, starting with the Yammer service for enterprise social collaboration. Avanade used Yammer to replace an underused on-premises solution, enabling it to decommission a server farm.

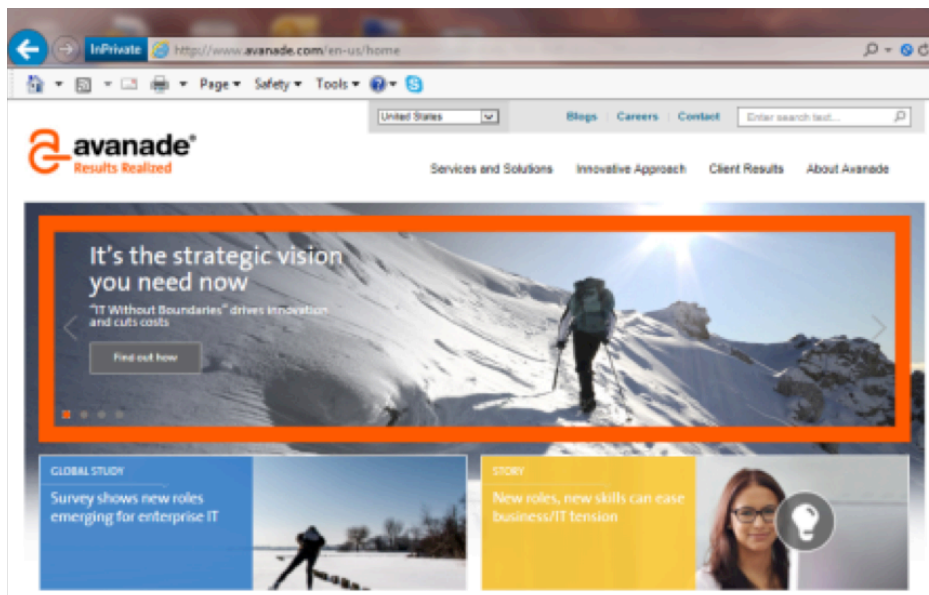
Employees responded enthusiastically to the fresh, intuitive Yammer interface. After 30 days, nearly 50 percent of all employees signed onto the platform, participating in more than 570 interest groups. A year later, over 15,000 monthly messages are shared in over 1700 groups.

SharePoint for Extranet, Intranet

Avanade subsequently adopted SharePoint Online for its extranet and file storage, and for its intranet.

The extranet is mission-critical at Avanade, consisting in part of project team spaces where consultants and their clients collaborate. Moving this from an on-premises deployment to SharePoint Online made great sense, because it gives Avanade the flexibility to add and delete sites quickly and cost effectively, and makes it easier to manage user authentication and access.

Traditionally, Avanade employees handled file storage through a variety of local devices and cloud services. The company needed a consistent, enterprise wide, secure cloud file system, and that's what it got with OneDrive for Business, part of Office 365.



By moving its public website to Sitecore on Azure, Avanade boosted its functionality while reducing its cost.

Sitecore on Azure for Website

Avanade also wanted to move its public-facing website, Avanade.com, from on-premise SharePoint to the cloud.

“SharePoint is superb as a collaboration tool within an enterprise or at the edge—with clients and suppliers,” Kim Kamla, Director of Enterprise Applications. “But for our public site, we wanted a platform that was less expensive, in part because we could run it with less customization.” Kamla and her colleagues met that goal with another Microsoft cloud service offering: Microsoft Azure. Avanade chose the Sitecore marketing platform, in a deployment hosted in Azure Platform-as-a-Service.

With Sitecore, Avanade gained streamlined workflow for managing content. With Azure, Avanade avoided the need to purchase, configure, and maintain servers for the all-important website function. Avanade’s Digital XD team worked with Marketing on a new digital strategy and branding to accompany the new site. All this allowed Avanade to significantly improve the digital customer experience, a solution they also deliver for their clients.

BI as a Service: Private Cloud

Avanade executives and managers are much like their counterparts at other companies, needing to turn data into insight that can be used to power decision-making and competitive advantage.

Like other companies, business intelligence at Avanade had sometimes been hamstrung by smokestack systems, difficulty in integrating internal and external data, and further difficulty in ensuring that increasingly mobile executives have anywhere, anytime access to BI.

Avanade saw its move to the cloud as a chance to address all that. Avanade’s solution is BI-as-a-Service, which enables the flexible integration of data sources, the use of highly visual and intuitive user interfaces, and the anytime, anywhere access that mobile users require.

Avanade runs its BI-as-a-Service in the Accenture Analytics Platform, which Avanade developed specifically to bring cloud-based BI to both Avanade and Accenture customers.

As with most of its initiatives—both for itself and its customers—Avanade identified a low risk, high reward application for its first BaaS offering: Customer Insight. This offering helps Avanade leadership to better understand client needs so they can better meet those needs. It provides a one-stop source for information that was formerly available only in a series of disparate databases, spreadsheets, and emails.

The success of Customer Insight has led Avanade to expand its use of BaaS to cover other functions, including HR and delivery of customer projects.

Benefits

“Avanade’s cloud strategy is all about helping the company to become a truly digital business that operates with greater agility, a greater focus on adding business value, and a greater ability to manage costs,” says Chris Miller, Avanade’s CIO. Here’s how that’s working out:

Delivers New Technology 12-18 Months Faster

The company’s experience with SharePoint exemplifies its new agility.

“With the traditional upgrade cycle, we’d spend a year to get on the current platform, which meant we were getting technology 12 to 18 months after it became available,” says Naqvi. “With Office 365, Microsoft can update SharePoint and Yammer every week, and we have those new capabilities immediately available for Avanade employees with little or no impact on our operations.”

By avoiding a time-consuming and expensive on-premises deployment project for Yammer, for example, Avanade consultants gained at least a year with the technology that they wouldn’t otherwise have had.

Reduces Costs by 80%

Avanade saves money, as well as time, through its cloud strategy. For starters, there’s the savings on on-premises software deployment and upgrade projects, which can be \$1 million or more per project.

And then there’s the capex infrastructure savings that comes with the cloud. By eliminating rather than refreshing the server farm for its public website, Avanade cut capex costs to support that application by 80 percent. Reducing capital investment allows Avanade to move more quickly in adopting new technologies.

Avanade is also closing rather than refreshing a datacenter used for development, testing, and disaster recovery. With the cloud, it can spin up dev/test servers whenever they’re needed and decommission them when they’re not, and disaster recovery is provided by their cloud vendors.

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Cameron estimates the savings from the datacenter closure to be \$500,000 on hardware, and another \$200,000 per year in operating costs. Two other datacenters will be rightsized, their footprints reduced by 60 to 80 percent.

Spurs Greater Business Value

Through its use of the cloud, Avanade is supporting more employees on more workloads and providing more services to those employees than ever before—without a comparable increase in the overall ITS budget. It improved productivity allows Avanade to invest in new services and workloads that make Avanade even better at doing what counts most: serving its customers.

For example, over the past three years, with headcount growth limited, new capabilities have been created by repurposing positions to new roles. New mobile app development, Experience Design, and Change Enablement teams have been created. The Experience Design (XD) group was started two years ago and has been instrumental in Avanade’s push to enable employees with leading digital solutions.

ITS has also built a change enablement team that optimizes the impact of new technologies for Avanade users.

At its most fundamental, the shift from datacenter to cloud has enabled a shift in the function of ITS at Avanade, too.

“In ITS, we have a renewed, expanded focus on being value creators for our customers—both internal and external,” says Adam Ellis, Director ITS Business Operations. “Almost everyone in ITS is dedicated not only to their own work, but to enabling the success of those across Avanade.. And our cloud strategy is helping to make this possible.”



About Avanade

Avanade helps customers realize results in a digital world through business technology solutions, cloud and managed services that combine insight, innovation and expertise focused on Microsoft technologies. Our people have helped thousands of organizations in all industries improve business agility, employee productivity and customer loyalty. Avanade combines the collective business, technical and industry expertise of its worldwide network of experts with the rigor of an industrialized delivery model to provide high quality solutions using proven and emerging technologies with flexible deployment models—on premises, cloud-based or outsourced. Avanade, which is majority owned by Accenture, was founded in 2000 by Accenture LLP and Microsoft Corporation and has 23,000 professionals in more than 20 countries. Additional information can be found at www.avanade.com

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