

Enable modern business applications

Customer Solution Case Study



Customer: Central YMCA

Website: www.ymca.co.uk

Customer Size: 650 employees

Country or Region: United Kingdom

Industry: Nonprofit—Membership organizations

Partner: dsp

Customer Profile

Central YMCA is a 170-year-old, London-based, nonprofit organization that provides fitness, training, accreditation, and philanthropic community services. It owns and manages central London's biggest gym.

Software and Services

- Microsoft Azure

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London's Biggest Gym Reduces Storage Costs, Gears for Expansion with Shift to Cloud

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Nick Gatt, Head of IT, Central YMCA

With aging servers, restricted budgets, and big ambitions, the London-based Central YMCA organization needed to find low-cost, highly scalable infrastructure that would meet strict data storage regulations. In 2013, the organization adopted Microsoft Azure and moved its databases to the cloud. Now, its databases are easier to manage; ICT costs are transparent and predictable; and executives can make more informed business decisions.

Business Needs

Founded in 1844, Central YMCA in London was the world's first YMCA establishment. Today, it is also the leading health and fitness charity in the United Kingdom: it runs the largest gym in central London and a variety of programs that aim to change lives for the better. These include fitness-trainer accreditation, health campaigns, theater groups, and a community center in the Kings Cross area of central London.

In 2013, information and communications technology (ICT) managers at Central YMCA had to reconcile outdated on-

premises servers, an anticipated upswing in demand for ICT, and limited financial resources. Head of IT at Central YMCA, Nick Gatt also confronted a growing list of projects that executives wanted to implement. Without new hardware, however, improved ICT services would have to be put on hold.

"We estimated that it would cost £20,000–£40,000 [US\$34,000–\$68,000] to upgrade our servers just to support our core CRM [customer relationship management] system and databases," says Gatt. "Our challenge, however, was how to ensure



that we would meet future demand. We digitize our accreditation records, and as demand increased, this required a huge increase in storage and back up. In addition, executives wanted business intelligence tools and a new email system.”

Executives also wished to expand through acquisition. With a small ICT staff and only one senior database administrator (DBA), however, Gatt believed he and his colleagues would struggle. Providing new employees with reliable access to Central YMCA accounting, CRM, and human resources systems would be impossible if it meant replicating Central YMCA systems on multiple sites.

“I needed new infrastructure that was faster, cheaper, and better—meaning it would cause us less trouble, with reduced risk of downtime,” says Gatt. “We were interested in the cloud, but we had no experience of it, and we had to be very careful. Our accreditation programs are regulated by government, and records have to be kept for life, properly backed up, and stored within the European Union.”

Solution

To identify the best solution, Central YMCA turned to dsp, a London-based ICT services company and a member of the Microsoft Partner Network, with Gold competencies in data platforms. Consultants from dsp suggested two cloud infrastructure providers: Sungard AS, a managed private cloud provider; and Microsoft Azure. To help Gatt make an objective assessment, dsp set up a trial to simulate YMCA Central workloads on both cloud platforms.

“We saw only a slight difference in performance between Sungard AS and Azure, and estimated only a slight variation in costs,” says Gatt. “What decided it for us was that Azure would be much easier to manage, and drastically reduce dependence on our DBA with regards to server management. Also, interoperability between Azure and identity management in Active

Directory would seriously reduce the workload for future integrations and cloud email deployment.”

The migration project commenced in September 2013. Consultants from dsp completed all principal tasks, including designing the proof of concept and determining the correct specifications for virtual machines. The Microsoft Azure Account Team engaged directly with dsp and YMCA to help guide them through the cloud migration process, including helping them configure disks to increase performance.

YMCA also purchased several hundred Microsoft Office 365 subscriptions, and with help from dsp, created a replica domain controller in Azure. This meant that Central YMCA could change the number of email accounts that it maintained from month to month. It could also guarantee access to cloud email, databases, and the CRM system from anywhere, in the event that its on-premises Active Directory server should fail.

Benefits

With its databases on Azure, Central YMCA has highly scalable storage that is automatically backed up, so data is easier to recover. ICT infrastructure is more cost-effective to administer and supports rapid expansion. The Central YMCA organization is also less dependent on a single London site.

Reduced Management Burden and Costs

By moving to Azure, Central YMCA was able to continue digitizing accreditation records and swiftly increase the number of databases it uses—from one in 2009 to more than 100 today. “We expected to spend £20,000–£40,000 [\$34,000–\$68,000] on new servers,” says Gatt. “Instead, we spend approximately £18,000 annually [\$31,000] moving to the cloud, but the difference is that there are no hidden costs to database administration, we have

automatic back up, and it takes less time to check our compliance.”

A More Reflexive ICT Service

With Azure, Gatt and his colleagues have greater agility at their command. “The situation is far more palatable for executives, because there is no expensive jump-off point to establishing a new capability,” he says. “This means that, today, it’s far easier for us to say ‘yes’ to a new request from executives. Now we are quite fleet of foot: we can scale up or down easily and transparently control the cost.”

Better Service Prioritization

Transparency means that executives can prioritize ICT spending more logically. “With Azure, it’s much easier for executives to equate the technology they pay for with the capabilities they get in return,” says Gatt. “Transparency gives executives real choice: if they are under pressure to provide more email storage, we can tell them exactly what it will cost.”

A Foundation for Corporate Expansion

In 2014, Microsoft Azure had a direct, positive impact on corporate strategy, when Central YMCA merged with an affiliated organization, YMCA Training. “There is simply no way we could have brought 650 new staff members from 23 sites into our core systems without Azure,” says Gatt. “As it is, we can place the client access on Azure, create a virtual private network, and then those 650 new staff have access to our core systems. Now, my biggest problem is connectivity—and that is solvable.”