dsp Uptime
All the time

Improving e-commerce through Microsoft Azure

Customer:
David Phillips

Industry:
Retail and Consumer Services

Solution:
MS SQL Data Platform
- Solution Design & Architecture

Profile:
David Phillips is a design-led residential and commercial contract furniture provider, who specialise in the letting industry. Their wide range of customers vary from small local landlords to global developers of sites such as Strata in London.

Although their headquarters is conveniently located in London, they operate out of several showrooms and sites around the country.

The Situation

As part of a series of strategic initiatives to support their growth plans, the team at David Phillips recognised the need to modernise their systems, improve their e-commerce capability and fully make use of technology in order to reduce operating costs.

David Phillips had previously invested significantly in Microsoft Dynamics NAV and CRM for core business activity. The NAV system was centre to core activity such as warehouse, stock management, procurement, finance, billing and order processing.

Traditionally, orders were managed centrally through a call centre; when an order was phoned through, the sales representative would use NAV to check stock levels and place orders.

Online orders were placed through a simple order form which had to be keyed in manually. This was time-consuming and inconvenient.

David Phillips needed a system that matched their growing business needs and could improve the following areas:

- Reduce in-bound calls and cut the costs associated with running the call centre.
- Save time and money by eliminating the process of receiving online orders and manually keying them into Microsoft Dynamics.
- Ensure customers had instant stock and order capability, keeping David Phillips in line with their larger competitors.

A partner was chosen for the e-commerce solution – significant investment was made to catalogue all stock, customise pages for specific customers and give customers real-time stock information by connecting them directly to the Microsoft Dynamics system.

The Challenge

The software development company focused on the functional and user interface of the system. Through engagement with this company, David Phillips' recognised the need for a specified infrastructure and data platform to underpin the new e-commerce solution.

They had a number of specific requirements, which were later refined into formal needs and scope.

The main challenges were as follows:
Performance - It was imperative that the new system was performing from the outset, ensuring that established customers adapted easily and had faith in the system. It should be easy to learn and understand, giving established customers a sense of improvement rather than disappointment.

Scalability - Like many businesses, David Phillips experiences some seasonal peaks. The current infrastructure was limited. Armed with the knowledge that maximum usage may only occur for 3 months of the year and given the growth plans; the IT team would be forced to cost the environment based on its peak usage.

Cost - Due to numerous unknown factors, such as the number of new customers/users who would benefit from the new system, all eventualities needed to be covered. This meant that David Phillips had to spend a significant amount on infrastructure.

Resource - David Phillips had limited internal resource with a distinct lack in data platform expertise, meaning it would prove difficult to put together an end-to-end solution.

The Solution - Data Platform Consultancy

After a number of successful projects with their Data Platform partner; dsp, David Phillips approached the company to consult on the new data platform. dsp was tasked with:

- Designing a suitably efficient data platform based on Microsoft SQL Server.
- Assisting in the bid process to choose the ideal infrastructure partner.

- Addressing all of the above concerns and finding the best solutions in relation to cost, scalability, performance and resource.

The first stage was to document the needs and requirements, before translating these into workable solutions. The next important step was to outline the infrastructure and architecture required to address these specific requirements.

Through a series of workshops, dsp consulted with David Phillips' management, infrastructure provider and e-commerce development partner. They were able to architect a suitable database, web and application tier that met each of David Phillips' criteria and also facilitated the business growth that had been planned.

The Solution – Microsoft Azure

Through these workshops, it was noted that traditional infrastructure providers may not be able to meet the scalability and cost needs of David Phillips.

David Phillips needed an environment that could grow seamlessly as their business grew, and had the required burst-ability of a true cloud platform.

As David Phillips' standardised on Microsoft, it made logical sense for dsp to recommend a Hybrid Azure Cloud Solution.

Dsp meticulously architected the solution to ensure the infrastructure – particularly the web and database tier – could automatically scale up during seasonal peak times, then scale down with the same automation with limited intervention from IT staff.

Benefits - Hybrid Cloud using Microsoft Azure

This solution required a data platform and web tier hosted in Azure, that could automatically fail-over to a secondary DR site in the event of hardware or environmental failure. This sort of security made the option even more appealing.

In addition, the solution required direct connectivity to David Phillips existing Microsoft Dynamics which was hosted in a co-location data centre elsewhere.

This Hybrid Solution provides David Phillips with the following benefits:

- **Scalability -** By automatically scaling up during peak periods, then scaling down when the system is used less, David Phillips only paid for what they needed making this a highly cost-effective service.

- **Cost Reduction -** Overall, the TCO was significantly lower than purchasing each element directly.

- **Cost Control -** David Phillips have now removed the need for cyclic CAPEX costs, and know exactly what their IT bills will be each month. This makes business budgeting so much easier and far more effective.

- **Extended Infrastructure -** With Azure, David Phillips' Marketing department can easily create new test environments which mirror the production; ensuring immediate market response to required functionality.

- **Supportability -** by partnering with dsp to manage both the Azure platform and SQL Servers, David Phillips did not need to invest in additional IT staff or worry about the system being maintained. Already having a positive experience with dsp also meant peace of mind and much less hassle.

Post Project

The project was a resounding success; this was due to careful planning, formal architecture and solution design. Due to this, the e-commerce solution was implemented on time and within budget.

To this day, dsp continues to provide ongoing management of the Azure e-commerce solution including database administration, Azure Infrastructure Support and ad-hoc consultancy to enhance or amend the solution as the business changes. David Phillips have been consistently delighted by the services provided by dsp and having a tailor-made system has helped significantly with the growth of the business.

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