

Solving Excessive Cloud Consumption at an Education Academies Group

Summary

A leading midlands-based group of academies came to Venture 1 Consulting to help fix spiralling cloud costs. This is a large organisation with over 30 schools, 2,000 staff and 16,000 pupils. The IT systems had grown organically with the expansion of the group of academies and the customer had looked to the cloud to accommodate this growth: primarily for **backup** and **file services**.

The Academy group had grown into the cloud with the same mind-set they had used for the school expansion, which was not to best practice and was not sympathetic to online costs. The net effect was that the Academies group was spending far more on cloud services than envisioned or budgeted for.

Venture 1 were able to help this group of academies by assisting in the change of IT strategy, and slashing cloud consumption costs. This was achieved by re-architecting to best practice and applying common sense to where operations ran and what was protected.

Additionally, Venture 1 Consulting assisted the Academies group to define which data required backup, which data required disaster protection, and what service levels should be applied to both. The result was that the Academies group achieved both backup and disaster recovery protection at a far lower operational cost than the legacy backup solution alone.

The Client

The Academies group is a midlands based organisation of 30 academies with over 16,000 pupils and 2,000 staff. The IT function for these academies is managed by a central charitable trust. The client operates with an information lead workforce and client base where access to systems and data is key. There is also a large turnaround of that data, and of students accessing the data, which creates a profile where there is consistent data aging over time.

A new IT management team has brought with it a desire to better plan IT strategy and provide consistency through a greater emphasis on planning. Therefore, any short term "fix" to the current overconsumption should be aligned with a longer term strategic direction.

The Challenge

The Trust were looking at their short, medium and longer term strategy with respect to cloud services. This review was prompted by recent excessive consumption of cloud services through an incorrectly implemented **backup solution**.

As with many schools, student data is local to the academies and therefore very distributed across the group. This is also aging data with only a small proportion active and useful over time. Local file servers store this user and departmental data, which were then backed up to the **Microsoft Azure cloud** using **Microsoft Data Protection Manager (DPM)**, where the DPM servers were running in the cloud. The configuration of services and servers in the cloud caused excessive consumption, where the cost of the backed up data was a fraction of running the backup servers.

The challenges were to:

- Take a look at the short and medium term cloud strategies so that they were appropriate to the Academy group's business requirements and to avoid spiralling costs.
- Look to increase the protection of schools systems from disasters.
- **Re-architect** the backup solution so that it:
 - Saved money.
 - Was in line with vendor best practice.
 - Was simplified.
 - Was fit for purpose.

- Save money.

The Solution

Venture 1 Consulting worked with the Academies on several layers with respect to their immediate and longer-term cloud goals. This was a requirements-lead consultation based around requirements gathering, solutions workshops and documented designs. Cost savings were achieved through a combination of:

- Correct application of technology with an understanding of the cost of the decisions taken.
- Appropriate use of technology so that it is in alignment with business and technical requirements and is not over engineered.
- Use of vendor funding wherever possible.



This engagement encompassed the following layers:

- Cloud Backup
- Cloud Site Recovery
- Data Centre Services Review
- Local Server Services Review

Venture 1 Consulting then worked in tandem with the local administrators to roll out the solution to the first few schools. Academies group administrators could then complete the rollout, allowing decommissioning of expensive legacy services.

In tandem Venture 1 Consulting performed a **risk-based assessment** of internal systems, identifying the scope of disaster recovery protection. **Microsoft Azure Site Recovery** was deployed to protect applications, as defined by the risk assessment. This part of the implementation culminated with disaster recovery testing to ensure that the systems recovery was to **RTO** and **RPO** objectives.

Microsoft StorSimple was used to provide an inexpensive off-site data storage area. This SAN automatically tiers old data into inexpensive cloud storage. The StorSimple solution also provided backup and disaster recovery capability for the data it contained.

Benefits

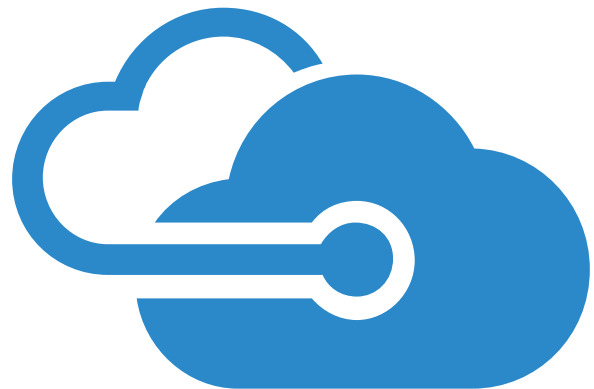
- The new system provides a much more secure backup solution by using the cloud.
- The customer now has a more cost effective solution, which fits their business needs.
- The new system is centralised and accessible to the administrators.
- Backups and restores are faster as recent backups are closer to the services.
- The solution provides more capability for less cost.

Technologies

- Microsoft Data Protection Manager.
- Microsoft Azure Backup.
- Microsoft Azure Site Recovery Manager.
- Microsoft Azure StorSimple.

Project Components

- Core Infrastructure and Security
- Solution Designs
- Systems Configuration
- Support and Guidance
- System Migration



About Venture 1 Consulting

Venture 1 Consulting is an IT Services company specialising in Microsoft infrastructure technologies and believes in working with clients to help develop and execute plans to meet business expectations. From our London headquarters, we approach all projects in a formal, yet relaxing way. We aim to provide exactly what is required: nothing more and nothing less. We are keen to work with you and not just for you, and maintain a high level of ongoing dialogue during the course of all our projects.

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