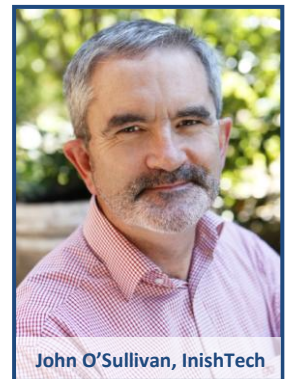


Migrating to the Azure Cloud

InishTech migrated their entire SLPS software license management platform to Windows Azure in November 2010. InishTech CTO & Head of Engineering John O'Sullivan shares his thoughts on thinking behind the move.

The Twenty-Minuters

I remember a particular sketch in the BBC comedy **Blackadder Goes Forth**, set in the trenches of Northern France during the First World War. Our eponymous hero Blackadder, who'll do anything to avoid hard work, certain death or anything in between is told that if he joins the glorious Royal Flying Corps, the "average time new pilots spend in the air is just twenty minutes".



"Twenty Minutes?" says Blackadder. "I did a twenty hour shift yesterday, with four hours overtime, in two feet of water!" Needless to say, he signs himself up immediately, only to discover during basic training that they are called the Twenty-Minuters because twenty minutes was the average *life expectancy* of a new pilot....

So, when I sat down with the team to schedule the actual switchover of our service, and they confidently told me that it would take "about twenty minutes", I couldn't help being reminded of Blackadder – after the obligatory twenty minutes, being shot to bits, crashing behind enemy lines in a plume of black smoke and being taken prisoner of the Red Baron Von Richthofen.

The Early Days

I guess we've been working towards our transition to Azure since the founding of InishTech in 2009. Just to explain this, we are actually quite unique in that InishTech are actually a spin out from Microsoft. In 2009, we took over the SLPS division that provides software licensing, monetization & IP protection solutions for software developers, and we formed InishTech. Microsoft remains closely involved as a significant minority shareholder. So, on one level it was just a matter of time that InishTech, a cloud service provider with a proposition that's custom designed for the .NET ecosystem, found its way onto Azure.

But our heritage alone would not be sufficient to make the business case for this. Like any startup we have too much to do and never enough time or resources, so something as significant as a move to the Azure platform had to be the right choice to begin with. The project had to be fully justified – from both a technical and commercial perspective, and it had to be planned carefully. After all, small companies can't afford to make big mistakes.

The Business Case

InishTech provide Software as a Service (SaaS) for .NET developers – so moving to Azure has a compelling logic. But what we actually do for our customers is also relevant here. InishTech provide a software license management platform in the cloud called SLPS. It enables ISVs to repurpose their applications so that they can exploit new and emerging software business models – like, yes you guessed it – SaaS!

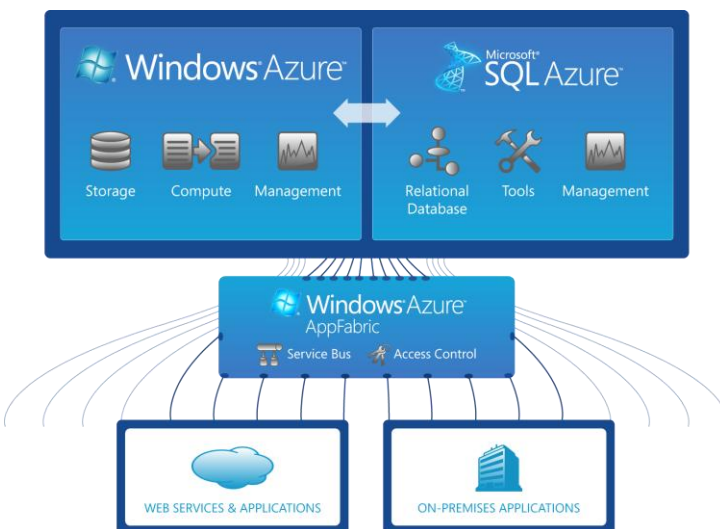
What we are seeing in the software business is a dramatic shift towards customer-led business models & new kinds of consumption patterns. The ways that software products are built, configured, packaged, sold, delivered, deployed, consumed and paid for are changing dramatically. SLPS gives the ISV the versatility to monetize their IP, no matter what go-to-market strategy they adopt.





With that in mind, we felt that being at the forefront in the transition to the cloud was an important endorsement and a real validation of our proposition for our customers. So, I guess there's a bit of image building, that's true. But it's also about projecting the right image to the market. Put yourself in your customer's shoes – say a drinks company or a clothing manufacturer. If they buy your software and run it "in-house" that's one thing. But asking them to farm it out to a SaaS provider is a totally different proposition. It may cost less, but there will always be questions around the trust which you're asking them to place in you and in your chosen service provider – in the reliability of your service, the security and integrity of your software application, the privacy and scalability of the system, in your compliance with the regulations and guidelines they must work within. Making the right choice in your cloud partner will go a long way towards addressing these concerns. Microsoft, we believe, was for us a good choice in this respect.

Benefits of Azure



affordable and scalable Azure / SQL Azure setup.

But let's talk about specifics, like cost, scale and availability. After all, this is the foundation on which we needed to build the decision for the move to Azure. We really need a dependable platform. Our customers' customers access the SLPS service 24x365. If our service goes down, we don't need an automatic notification - our customers are on to us in minutes. SLPS fits the mould of an application that benefits from the Azure proposition – we need exceptionally high availability, we need to be able to scale up and down rapidly, and as a startup, we'd prefer not to have to spend money if we can possibly avoid it.

We expected there to be a cost differential and we were not disappointed. We realised a significant reduction in our monthly hosting charges when we moved from a substantial dedicated hardware configuration with a DB cluster to a much more

There is also the ability to spin up new instances as required to meet demand, a feature we fully expect to need in the near future. Built-in load balancing & automatic failover were also really appealing features. But it's the unexpected benefits that have really made the difference. Azure does a lot behind the scenes, which ultimately impacts on the daily routine of the engineering team. One of the most significant impacts was that some of the more mind numbing processes like running scripts & doing backups are no longer required, which is giving the gift of time back to the team for core development work.

The other thing I didn't see coming was the way it is opening up new markets and new opportunities for InishTech. The nature of the customer conversation has changed. People are genuinely more interested in getting into a dialogue, because they feel not only we can help them, but that we've put our money where our mouth is.

In Conclusion

Next month, our Senior Azure Developer and project lead for the Azure transition Peter McEvoy is going to take the helm. Peter is going to provide some tips and tricks for anyone looking to redevelop their application for Windows Azure.

So, I know what you're wondering. Did it take "twenty minutes"? Of course it didn't! But we did get finished by lunchtime. And we didn't go down in a plume of black smoke. And that's good enough for me.

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