

Food Services Software Provider Moves to the Cloud to Grow Business

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*— Travis Sellers, Program Manager,
Food Service Solutions, Inc.*

OVERVIEW

Food Service Solutions is known for its client/server, biometric point-of-sale solutions in schools. To grow market share and simplify IT, it is migrating its solution to Windows Azure to run in an easily managed, scalable, and reliable cloud environment. Now it can provide better service to school districts and reduce the need for on-premises infrastructure. Together, the solution is a better fit for customers struggling with budget cuts and changing government regulations.

CHALLENGE

Food Service Solutions develops innovative, biometric point of sale (POS) solutions. The company’s client/server solution, POSitive ID, targets the academic market. School districts house POSitive ID data in their on-premises servers running Microsoft SQL Server data management software. An online component, My School Account (MSA), enables parents to make payments into children’s meal accounts. MSA is supported by the company’s Microsoft SQL Server 2008 R2 database, which contains student demographic data and transaction records and is hosted at a data center in Los Angeles, California. Every night, districts’ servers upload daily transactions to the MSA database and download any online payments.

“The central database model worked well and we did not have enough control over our disaster recovery plan. If we requested an upgrade to the server, it took too long. We wanted to mitigate our risk; any downtime would result in frustration of our clients,” says Travis Sellers, Program Manager at Food Service Solutions. “Schools needed a more flexible and reliable way to manage their cafeteria programs which have a direct impact on all federal and state funding. This new infrastructure allows us to better serve the changing needs of our customers.”

Food Service Solutions saw cloud computing as a way to run its business solutions that is more reliable, scalable, and flexible—with no on-premises infrastructure required. “We were limited in our ability to provide solutions for schools that had complex requirements. By moving to the cloud, our solution provides the best solution in the industry for schools looking to solve their problems,” says David Pisanick, Vice President of Technology at Food Service Solutions. “Our partnership with Microsoft allows us to move confidently into the future.”



SOLUTION

Pisanick interviewed several software developers and chose Hanu Software Solutions. "Hanu stood out in the way they handled a small test run for us," says Pisanick. "Every time we got together, I heard four or five more reasons why we should migrate to the cloud, and it was always about Windows Azure. I quickly saw how the range of data storage and infrastructure services with Window Azure made it the right choice for us."

The company asked Hanu to re-write its POS system from a C++ based program into a Microsoft .NET-connected solution to be hosted on Windows Azure. Hanu suggested the company begin with migrating the MSA solution because it was already built on the Microsoft .NET Framework. At the same time, Hanu would migrate the MSA database to Microsoft SQL Azure, relational data services based on SQL Server data management software, but delivered in the cloud. Food Service Solutions can use the Microsoft SQL Azure Data Sync web service to enable bidirectional synchronizations between SQL Azure and the districts' databases in real time without having to write any code. "We liked Hanu's suggestion: it solved our immediate worries about security and scalability," says Sellers. "We also asked Hanu to redesign the MSA site with a rich, new user interface."

Hanu Software Solutions completed the database migration in a month and began working on the website update. Food Service Solutions asked the Hanu team to integrate a sister solution, My Club Account (MCA), with MSA and migrate them both to the cloud. MCA provides private account access on a web portal for customers in other vertical markets. "When both sites reside on Windows Azure, we will no longer have to manage multiple code bases," says Sellers.

TOOLS & TECHNOLOGIES

Windows Azure

- Microsoft SQL Azure

Windows Server Product Portfolio

- Microsoft SQL Server 2008 R2

Technologies

- Microsoft .NET Framework

BENEFITS

When both MSA and MCA are running in the Windows Azure platform, Food Service Solutions will have the beginnings of a new way of doing business. "A move to Windows Azure will mean more security, scalability and a flexible, service-based business model, so school districts won't need to invest in as much expensive infrastructure to use our solutions. It's going to be a huge competitive advantage," says Sellers.

REDUCES RISK

When Food Service Solutions migrated its database to SQL Azure, IT staff relaxed. All data held in Windows Azure storage is replicated three times. "The key reason for moving to Windows Azure was availability," confirms Pisanick. "SQL Azure gives us a level of comfort with the MSA database that's new: the service replicates multiple copies of our data to multiple physical servers to maintain availability and business continuity."

SIMPLIFIES IT TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY

When both the MSA and MCA solutions run in the cloud, our team will save time maintaining the sites' content. "Our support team is busy, so anything that saves us time and allows us to services our clients better is something that has our attention," says Sellers. "With the SQL Azure Data Sync, we increase our systems responsiveness, scalability and security."

OFFERS SCALABLE PLATFORM FOR GROWTH

When the company migrates the entire POSitive ID system to the cloud it plans on offering a flexible, service based pricing model an option that better accommodates school districts big and small. "When you have a product that scales easily and rapidly, you maximize your chances for success," says Pisanick. "Windows Azure is a great benefit to our customers. It's going to allow us to better help our customers."

About Food Service Solutions, Inc.

Founded in 1989, Food Service Solutions builds software that is focused on the institutional food service sector. The company is headquartered in Newry, PA and it serves thousands of customers across six continents.

About Hanu Leveraging best-in-class people, processes, and technologies, Hanu provides high-quality, high-value software development and business process outsourcing services to independent software vendors (ISVs) and enterprises. Founded in 2002, Hanu is dedicated to developing effective outsourcing partnerships with clients in order to accelerate time to market, reduce operational cost and empower them to devote more time to their core business.

www.hanusoftware.com

Headquarters & Onshore Technology Center

5 Independence Way, Suite 300
Princeton, NJ 08540

P: (800) 520-1816 / F: (609) 945-2390

Offshore Solution Delivery Center (OSDC)

657, Udyog Vihar, Phase V.
Gurgaon 122016

P: 91.124.4139102 / VoIP:
1.732.658.5205