

Data#3 Customer Story

Kubota

Kubota takes control of the future with network uplift and Microsoft Azure migration delivered by Data#3



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Industry Insight

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Dan Lodder, Head of Enterprise IT,
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Objective

Kubota Australia sought to achieve cost efficiency and complexity by moving away from private cloud to a more scalable environment in Microsoft Azure.

Benefits

- Simplified network with improved performance
- Greater visibility and scalability with Microsoft Azure
- Improved managed service support and service management
- Access to large pool of IT expertise
- Cost efficiency by moving to a consumption-based model
- Improved end user experience due to less complex network
- Reduced pressure on the in-house IT team allowing for greater focus on serving the business

Solutions & Services

- ✓ Microsoft Azure
- ✓ Managed Services

Approach

In an extensive RFP process, the Kubota team defined the requirements of the project and invited tender responses. Through a detailed review and selection process, ultimately, Data#3 was selected due to their demonstrated depth of Microsoft Azure expertise and comprehensive managed services capability.

Testimonial

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The Background

Founded in 1890, Kubota's reputation for quality helped it expand to become a world-leading supplier of agricultural equipment. Since Kubota's Australian operations began almost four decades ago, customers in agriculture, construction and utilities have come to depend on Kubota's product excellence.

With a history steeped in tradition, Kubota also embraces the advantages of modern technology. When the business committed to transitioning its worldwide subsidiaries and headquarters to a Microsoft Azure environment, the Australian IT team was quick to identify the potential cost and flexibility benefits on offer.

The Challenge

Careful management of costs and growth enablement are two of the key elements of Kubota's success. These guiding principles are evident throughout the business, and the IT environment is no exception. As cloud technologies matured, the incoming Kubota Australia Head of Enterprise IT, Dan Lodder, said there was an opportunity to rethink the way technology was delivered.

“There were two primary reasons for the change. Firstly, we were coming to the end of our Microsoft contracts with our existing vendors. Secondly, Kubota Japan signed a global agreement to get all Kubota locations onto the Microsoft Azure platform,” explained Lodder.

“I was walking into this with a mandate to make critical decisions at the right time. Coming from a role where Microsoft Azure was the primary environment, I was keen to introduce the benefits, but our in-house IT team hadn't dealt with a platform like Microsoft Azure, so our choice of partner was crucial.”

“The IT team managed a number of data centres and this presented opportunities for process enhancements,” said Lodder.

Lodder pointed to changing times as the primary driver and said his predecessor in the role had already established that the end of the MSP contract would be the right time for a change.

“In the past there was a big push for data sovereignty, so the Amazons and Microsoft Azures of the world didn't have the same foothold.”

Now, with more geographic locations than any other cloud service provider¹, including data centres in multiple Australian cities, Microsoft Azure has addressed the sovereignty issue comprehensively. Still, Kubota saw the benefit of combining this global service with local expertise and support.

“We are a company with operations across Australia and New Zealand. We identified the opportunity to work with Data#3,” said Lodder.

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IT Outcome

Kubota selected a solution proposed by Data#3 that included uplift and consolidation of its network, replacing existing technology with Cisco Meraki SD-WAN. Multiple data centres were removed, with production workloads migrated to Microsoft Azure. The Data#3 team provides monitoring and support of the new environment under a Microsoft Azure Managed Services contract, giving Kubota access to a large team of certified experts in the full range of Microsoft Azure specialities. Support for Kubota’s network devices was also built into the solution, giving the in-house team greater freedom to focus on business growth activities.

“Data#3 brings the structure, and our small team doesn’t have the time to do that oversight day-to-day, plus they bring an extended talent skillset. I had to question whether it was cost-effective for us to do it, or do we use the infrastructure guys who work within our business and ask what outcome we need. Rather than our team rebooting a server at 2 a.m. they can be more strategic in their thinking, knowing we have that covered,” outlined Lodder.

“We are no longer running around plugging in cables, we are doing it all virtually now.”

The transition itself was straightforward, with the Data#3 and Kubota teams, backed by Microsoft, working closely together to transition workloads. Skills transfer played an important part in the process, with the in-house team embracing the opportunity to work alongside Microsoft Azure specialists.

“Moving from Infrastructure as a Service to Microsoft Azure was mostly a ‘lift and shift’ but we adopted new systems along the way, where there was a compelling reason to change. Data#3 was instrumental in identifying those services that would give us a clear advantage,” described Lodder.

“The biggest benefit is knowing what can be done, and always having the option of tagging along, which gave us significant skills transfer from Data#3. We have a couple of trainees rising in the ranks and learning as they go. The project meant we could have the right person in the room if we wanted to ask questions about, say, licences, the team at Data#3 would spend time discussing options, do the analysis and report back. This informal learning means our overall skills are improving in this new environment.”

Planning that transition began in late 2020, a time when the Kubota team was kept very busy supporting the business through changing COVID-19 related restrictions, and Lodder said effective project management was key.

“We took six months to fully migrate because we had many interconnections back to Japan and needed one thing to finish before the next started. Each element had to be managed logically.”

Kubota

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Business Outcome

The new solution provides Kubota with improved performance, applications are running better, and the Kubota IT team no longer needs to devote its time to resolving infrastructure issues. They now have full visibility of their environment, so they can devote their time to high value projects.

“Sometimes, silence is golden, and now we are getting no problems, there are fewer user complaints telling us something has gone wrong, and our overall solution queries are becoming less and less. I am trying instead to focus the team on what they can bring to Kubota, and I don't want them doing mundane tasks that can be automated in Microsoft Azure or that we can leverage our partnership with Data#3 to do. They can provide the 24/7 access to helpdesk and senior engineers, so our team no longer needs to do that work to keep systems alive,” explained Lodder.

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Working along with the in-house team, Lodder said that Data#3 now feels like an extended part of that team, and that finding a well-matched partner makes the experience far more valuable.

“We speak with the Data#3 engineers regularly, sometimes daily when we were mid project, and they are like our second team. We have a great in-house team, but we don't hold Data#3 at arm's length, we are in it together. Culture is also a really important factor – we don't feel like we are asking them a favour when we call.”

Kubota has achieved its long-term success with effective cost management, a feature further supported by the in-house IT team who strive to return exceptional value for all expenditure. Lodder said that the worldwide push towards the Microsoft Azure platform fit this ethos perfectly, with his team quick to capitalise on the benefits.

“Cost is an important driver in business because we have to be competitive. We also prioritised reliability, and we have a dependable local vendor and the power of Microsoft Azure. We are satisfied with the reliability that global cloud can bring,” described Lodder.

“My gut feel looking at Data#3 invoices compared to the invoices I used to sign off on is that we are spending considerably less on our new environment, and in a position to reallocate funds where we can bring more operational benefit. Now we have the scope to look at new initiatives knowing we can afford the investment, and we are now able to use our funds more strategically.”

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Conclusion

When considering both a transition to public cloud and ongoing managed service, Lodder recommended avoiding preconceived ideas and get to know potential IT partners well, given the integral role they play.

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Instead, Lodder advises to consider the skills needed, and the overall fit with the in-house team.

“The highlight was the Data#3 project management capabilities and the skillset that they bring. Data#3 brings teams of engineers and data experts to help. Whatever we need, they readily dip into their talent pool. They have a considered, well thought-out project management process to bring things all together.”

With the pace of technology change ever-increasing, Lodder said that an increasingly important part of the IT partner role is to filter what is important to Kubota. Regular, ongoing communication facilitates future planning, positioning the business well to capitalise on sound technology choices.

“We speak with our Data#3 Account Manager two or three times weekly, and they bring the relevant specialists into the discussions, whether they are focused on infrastructure and Microsoft platforms, a licensing expert, whatever is needed.”

“I wouldn’t give them the work continually if I didn’t like the people I was working with. I look for the good relationships, people who provide outcomes without us having to push too hard. They are affable and friendly, they make our lives easier, and they enjoy our successes, so as a modest-sized business, we can really punch above our weight,” concluded Lodder.

¹ Microsoft Azure Geographies' (2022) [Online] <https://azure.microsoft.com/en-au/global-infrastructure/geographies/>

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Data#3 and Microsoft

Since 1994, Data#3 has combined forces with Microsoft to help our customers adapt and grow. Today, we are Microsoft's largest Australian business partner with the highest level of competency across the Microsoft ecosystem. Our hundreds of accredited consultants are ready to help our customers deliver the digital future; from enhancing productivity and collaboration with Microsoft 365 and the latest Surface devices, to transforming business processes with Dynamics 365, to ensuring our customers get the most value from Azure cloud. Our scale and expertise enable our unparalleled support to customers selecting, deploying, managing and securing Microsoft applications, products and devices.

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