

Data#3 Customer Story

Knight Frank

*Cloud Transition: An Azure
Success Story for Knight Frank*

Data#3



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Testimonial

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Objective

Knight Frank is in the process of digital transformation to maintain its position as a leader of innovation in its industry, and the business wanted to work with a highly experienced technology services provider to ensure a smooth transition to cloud.

Approach

With end of life approaching for much of its data centre infrastructure, and an organisational shift to operational expenditure (OPEX), Knight Frank knew the timing was right to transition to the cloud. The IT team considered multiple proposals and chose to work with Data#3 because of a trusted existing relationship. Data#3's position as Microsoft's largest Microsoft partner in Australia and proven expertise in Microsoft Azure were key factors.

Solutions & Services

- ☑ Microsoft Azure
- ☑ Migration Services

Benefits

- Varied workloads transitioned to Microsoft Azure platform
- Skills transfer to in-house IT team
- Speed and flexibility
- Improved performance
- Improved security
- Cost savings
- Speed to market with new ideas
- OPEX-based model
- Positive user feedback

Project Highlight

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The Background

Knight Frank Australia is part of a global consultancy that has been matching families and businesses with their perfect properties for more than 125 years. The 1,000-strong Australian team works from 20 offices around the country, and prides itself on combining innovation, industry knowledge and traditional service to give clients the best possible outcome.

Technology plays a key role in supporting the business. Knight Frank’s modest, busy IT team is ably guiding the business through digital transformation. Transitioning to cloud was central to this process, and as data centre infrastructure neared end of life, the time was right.

The Challenge

The property industry is highly competitive, and Knight Frank has maintained a leading position for more than a century thanks largely to a desire to continually innovate and improve service. Technology has played an increasingly key role and Head of Information Technology, Craig Holt, said the business saw digital transformation as a necessary process to stay at the forefront, with a cloud implementation central to this process.

“The biggest reason for our timing was the fact that we were running legacy hardware in our two data centres. To replace that legacy equipment would require substantial capital expense, and we leaned strongly towards an OPEX model that made costs more manageable. We knew it would be hard to ask for substantial capital expenditure (CAPEX), and we had to ask ourselves whether we wanted to carry two data centres of legacy equipment for the next five to seven years,” explained Holt.

In the time since the last major data centre refresh, it wasn’t only technology that had moved on. The way the business operates, and the expectations of users and clients, have also profoundly changed.

“We’ve had a real move towards 24/7 operation from our clients, and that means we can’t just schedule outages as we have once done in the past,” said Holt.

The IT department and Knight Frank leadership group had strong ideas that could bring competitive advantage, whether by new service offerings or by supporting users to work more efficiently. With the on-premises environment, though, Holt said rolling out new ideas was frustratingly slow and costly.

“In the physical data centre realm, we invest large sums of money for equipment to run a test, and then shut it down a week later if it didn’t work. Infrastructure is a big commitment.”

Security was also a consideration. The property sector is heavily targeted by cybercriminals, with losses from payment redirection scams reported in the first half of 2022 increasing by 124.4 percent over the previous year, according to [REINSW](#). The responsibility towards clients and staff is one that Knight Frank takes very seriously, and data protection was high on the agenda when considering how to progress.

“We always want to reduce risks, and the security landscape had changed. We saw the potential to improve security with a transition to the cloud. The measures that a provider like Microsoft has in place go way beyond what most companies could realistically put in place themselves,” outlined Holt.

Knight Frank

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IT Outcome

To get a clearer understanding of their situation, Knight Frank opted to undergo a free Data#3 Cloud Migration Assessment with Turbonomic to assess their environment and user needs. This helped to narrow down the best cloud choice to Microsoft Azure, with Microsoft Azure BI and Analytics to gain a level of clarity that the on-premises environment had lacked.

“The project gained traction via the expertise from the Data#3 consultants, and we felt confident it was the right choice to migrate our systems to Microsoft Azure,” commented Holt.

As a modest IT team with branches around the country, it was important to Knight Frank to get trusted help with the planning and workload migration from data centre to cloud. A series of workshops and preparation activities helped to fine-tune the plan and prepare for success.

“We sat with Data#3 and audited all of our production systems using a Microsoft assessment tool to find out exactly what we had in place. During these sessions with Data#3, we investigated everything we wanted to move – there were some easy pickings that we could just lift and shift, then we looked at machines that we could decommission and move to Microsoft Azure appliances, away from a server architecture and into Platform as a Service. For example, we reduced our SQL estate heavily, with a reduction in licences to match.”

“We divided it into four transitions, carried out over 18 months. The great thing about Microsoft Azure transitions is that we were able to migrate systems, test over the weekend, and make sure everything was right before committing – we were able to roll things back if we felt they were not right. Fortunately, we only did a couple of minor roll backs, and it went smoothly,” explained Holt.

It wasn't only the data centres that were no longer needed. Previously, site equipment was needed in every Knight Frank office, most of which did not have a dedicated IT resource in place, which was challenging for the IT team.

“This has allowed us to move away from having any server hardware in any office and will finish the decommissioning of site hardware in early 2023. One, we no longer have to spend time upgrading hardware, two, we have less licences to pay for, three, we have less software and four, we have been able to consolidate all data to one location, instead of all over the place. It is huge for security because we don't have to worry about physical security any more on those sites,” outlined Holt.

Flexibility has been a big winner from the transition to Microsoft Azure. Where once, changes would require lengthy planning, acquisition of equipment, and resource-intensive implementation, now, Holt said, the business can try out new ideas almost instantly.

“We have the capability to stand up a whole environment for testing and fail fast, then start again. That was something we couldn't do with physical equipment, which was a real commitment. We don't have to worry about hardware specs anymore either – if we want to try something, we can just crank up the dial, then switch it off if it is no longer needed.”

While the Knight Frank team remains ever vigilant, the security advantages of the transition to Microsoft Azure have been keenly welcomed.

“It has reduced our security risk because of the standards that Microsoft have. They have skilled people constantly monitoring their environment, with both physical and virtual security more advanced than we could provide in our old on-premises data centre. We were able to review our security with Data#3 as part of our migration, and the data centre closure saw our score improve substantially on an external security assessment.”

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Business Outcome

The Knight Frank IT team has a strong focus on delivering a superior service to their users and the flexibility they gained contributed to successfully delivering on their project outcomes. There were also some less anticipated gains that caught user attention.

“We believed we had good performance, then we migrated to Microsoft Azure. Suddenly, we had departments commenting on improved system performance internally and external clients also raising positive performance gains,” recounted Holt.

The direct and indirect cost benefits have been significant for Knight Frank. What Holt described as a “flexible commitment to resources” enabled by the cloud environment mean that the business only pays for the resources it uses, when it uses them, without the waste of on-premises hardware sitting idle when it is not needed. That was only the start.

“We have office moves coming up and we don’t have to worry about provision of server rooms, so it is less hassle and expense. No special air conditioning and heat control are needed for sensitive equipment, which is another huge benefit,” said Holt.

“The development team can stand up equipment and, more importantly, stand it down when they are not using it, with auto shut-down reducing energy usage and cost.”

A reduction in energy consumption also serves to support environmental initiatives within the business, something that Holt has seen resonating with the Knight Frank client base.

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Conclusion

Transitioning to cloud has clear advantages in terms of flexibility, performance, and both financial and environmental cost but to gain full benefit, Holt said it is necessary to choose the right technology partner.

“It can be daunting, and it required a huge change in skills. Find a partner who is going to assist in building those skills through show and tell, and skill share sessions. We now have a team who are super-proficient with Microsoft Azure, and this came from Data#3’s knowledge transfer,” recalled Holt.

“They have a huge depth of resources, people of all skill levels, and they are backed by Microsoft supporting them. We had Microsoft on our fortnightly calls to go through any challenges we had and help us with any unknowns.”

Transitioning to the Microsoft Azure environment has freed Knight Frank from the usual hardware upgrade cycle, something that Holt described as “stressful” and “always involving risk”. Instead, the team can concentrate on the innovation and attention to detail that has given the business its highly regarded reputation.

“Replacing hardware in a data centre is fraught with potential problems but it will never again be a problem for us. There’s no way our internal team, no matter how good, could maintain an environment like Microsoft can because they have the resources. The way we look at it, if a system has a problem at Microsoft, they have got thousands of people to fix it – here we have a modest team.”

“Things are vastly different now. We have unlimited flexibility, if we need a sudden increase, we have the capability to provide it. The flexibility is the biggest thing.”

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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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