



rackspace

Rackspace Customer Story – Charity

Helping Oxfam reach its goal of ending poverty, faster

Oxfam wanted to be more efficient and agile, with a modern, flexible IT estate. In partnership with Rackspace, it embarked on an ambitious 14-month transformation to migrate its entire application estate to Azure.

Our customer

Oxfam is a non-profit organisation working towards ending poverty. It has a worldwide presence, from ongoing charitable work to teams dedicated to responding to major emergencies.

The obstacles they faced

Oxfam needed a partner to help the organisation understand its existing IT landscape, workloads and dependencies, and work on a cloud migration solution.

How we helped

Our professional services team worked with in-house expertise at Oxfam to assess the existing estate and drew up detailed migration plans Microsoft Azure.

What we achieved together

31 workloads were successfully migrated to Azure in under 12 months, and all were completed first time. Oxfam is now more flexible and agile, and has considerably reduced its operating costs.





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Amber Burke, CIO, Oxfam

Oxfam is a movement of millions, working towards one goal – an end to poverty. Its central idea is everyone plays a part, no matter how small, so we collectively take on the big issues that keep people poor.

The organisation has 10,000 staff across 120 locations, many in areas suffering political turmoil, natural disasters, disease and famine. At any given time, Oxfam teams are responding to an average of 25 emergencies. Campaigns and shops encourage donations from the public, to fund such ventures.

To do the most good, Oxfam recognised a need to be more efficient regarding its infrastructure, which was proving inflexible. “Our aim was to make the very best use of

Oxfam’s resources, by delivering a more cost-effective, modern, stable IT estate that would unlock flexibility and agility,” explains Oxfam CIO Amber Burke. To do this, various challenges had to be overcome.

Working at scale

Oxfam’s position prior to the project meant the company had to be very reactive to cope with demand. This left less time to focus on proactive improvements, and presented operational and business risks. “Events that created a massive influx of activity on our website would cause great strain,” says Amber, “and although we had the means to

adjust bandwidth, it was limited. If it wasn’t done in time, sites lost traffic and potential revenue. It was a stressful, time-consuming task to constantly monitor traffic and ensure the IT estate had capacity.”

There were issues with reliability. “We used to have frequent problems with servers, where vital services were unavailable while one was being rebooted,” says Amber. “And with our solution being custom-developed for Oxfam, there was no way to benefit from the economics of scale. We couldn’t utilise services already built on the likes of Azure, signed off by financial and government organisations to meet stringent standards.

“The aim, then, was to migrate to a solution where the technologies underpinning everything were reliable, scalable, secure, and flexible. And rather than buying assets that depreciated over time, Oxfam would embrace a ‘pay as you go’ model”. This would better place the organisation to scale for emergencies, festivals or just experimentation, be more accountable to donors, and maximise operational effectiveness and efficiency to help as many people on the ground as possible.

A design for resilience and value

In October 2016, Oxfam embarked on a 14-month project with Rackspace to design, plan and implement the migration of the application estate – then hosted across three data centres – to Microsoft Azure. The scope included Oxfam’s website, donation platform, HR and finance systems, internal logistic system and additional applications proprietary to Oxfam.

The collaborative effort between Oxfam’s expert team and Rackspace identified workloads that could be decommissioned, and areas to reduce overheads and maximise value. The Azure deployment was split across two Azure regions to assure resilience, boost cost-effectiveness, and enhance security and compliance.

Throughout, the partnership looked to define roles and processes in the most appropriate and effective ways. “We really wanted to provide more time for our business, and Rackspace enabled this to happen,” says Amber. “They run the bread-and-butter services our internal teams previously managed – backups; patching; server builds. This freed up Oxfam’s internal teams to focus on value items related to our core business.”

The flexibility and scalability of the cloud had an immediate impact. Oxfam can now scale with agility to meet the changing patterns in demand that follow a disaster appeal. And on Black Friday, for the first time ever, the web shop could add capacity ‘on-the-fly’ to cope with demand, with no downtime.

Most of all, the boost in performance has enabled the team at Oxfam more time and space to focus on strategic decision making. Adding new applications is now much faster and a more efficient IT infrastructure helps Oxfam manage costs, knowing when to scale

up and down for advanced management of both applications and business units.

Performance boosts

Post-migration, website reliability and performance improvements resulted in more donations. The average conversion rate jumped from 21% in the six months prior to 32% in the six months after. “There were big changes in page responsiveness,” says Amber. “For Single Giving donations, average page load times dropped from 1.82 seconds to just 0.02. That’s vital, because it only takes a second for someone to change their mind. Support can be lost because of an error or delay.”

Load times for people applying to be Oxfam Volunteers during festival season dropped from 17.2 seconds to 0.16, boosting sign-ups. Also, Oxfam’s online shop enjoyed a 22% increase in sales, and during the first post-migration Black Friday event had record sales and no outages. “Since Azure, key customer journeys were completed 50% faster, meaning more transactions and better customer service,” explains Amber. “Load times are down too. We saw a 3.5% increase in conversion from speed improvements alone, which translates to an extra £162,000 per year.”

Other areas of the business also responded positively. Putting Oxfam’s applications into the cloud removed the head office as a single point of failure, ensuring applications are now always available to international colleagues. And the ability of staff to run supply chain reports and track aid distribution is twice as effective.



Digging into data

There are moves within Oxfam to explore data more holistically, and this is possible now Azure holds Oxfam's DataHub. "We want to spot trends on a wider scale, know more about our programmes and act accordingly," explains Amber. "With better quality data, we can improve accountability and safeguard the rights of people we help. In turn, this can help influence government policies and social schemes.

Oxfam's now better placed for the future in other areas as well. "Previously, we had 450 servers around the world," says Amber. "But now we pay for what we need, when we need it. We can manage our budget more effectively, see true running costs as-is, and obtain accurate quotes to adjust resources for new initiatives. Additionally, instead of going through a lengthy procurement exercise to scale up our website, we now pull a bar to the right and click Save!"

The organisation can evolve based on its needs, rather than being tied to legacy kit or services. "In the past, we'd sweat an asset because it cost money, and it might become unreliable towards the end of its lifecycle," says Amber. "But now we can immediately choose to switch to something newer and only pay the difference."

Ready for the future

The benefits of the cloud have been felt throughout Oxfam in a very real way. Since completion of the migration, Oxfam has reduced monthly Azure expenditure by 20%, and yet the organisation feels it can respond more quickly and effectively in an emergency, or during peak seasonal events. The entirety of the infrastructure is more reliable, and also more secure. Each environment in Azure has its own Firewall-like structure surrounding it, and other

security features baked in (such as denial of service protection). This is backed by out-of-hours Rackspace support that ensures help is always on hand, when required.

"This was a huge and ambitious undertaking – not least given the comparatively short timeframe – but Oxfam and Rackspace together delivered it on time, within budget, and exceeding the expected quality," says Amber. "Moreover, we were particularly impressed with the excellent cultural fit between our two organisations, which has allowed us to forge an ongoing collaborative partnership to achieve a common goal."

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Amber Burke - CIO, Oxfam

About Rackspace

At Rackspace, we accelerate the value of the cloud during every phase of digital transformation. By managing apps, data, security and multiple clouds, we are the best choice to help customers get to the cloud, innovate with new technologies and maximise their IT investments. As a recognised Gartner Magic Quadrant leader, we are uniquely positioned to close the gap between the complex reality of today and the promise of tomorrow. Passionate about customer success, we provide unbiased expertise, based on proven results, across all the leading technologies. And across every interaction worldwide, we deliver Fanatical Experience™ – the best customer service experience in the industry. Rackspace has been honoured within the top 100 Great Places to Work for more than a decade.

Learn more at www.rackspace.com

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