Copyright Licensing Agency

Enhancing customer solutions with cloud-hosted web applications from Advanced

CASE STUDY

Copyright Licensing Agency enhances customer solutions with cloud-hosted web applications

At the Copyright Licensing Agency (CLA) we are always looking for ways to enhance the services we offer our customers who want to use and share copyright material.

Client >
The Copyright Licensing Agency

Sector >
Publishing

Project >
Cloud-hosted web applications

"Advanced has successfully built a really strong, resilient and flexible platform that offers versatility and scope for many years to come."

Adam Sewell> IT Director >
The Copyright Licensing Agency

At the CLA it became clear to us that there was a real demand from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to purchase an additional chapter or article over and above what was available under the current licence. We saw an opportunity to create a solution that suited the HEIs and the copyright owners by developing an additional web application.

In August 2015 we went live at the CLA with a new application created by Advanced and delivered via the Microsoft Azure platform within a hybrid cloud solution. This Platform as a Service (PaaS) model provided the flexible, scalable solution we were looking for without the effort of managing a complex infrastructure. The application has reduced the time it takes for our customers to buy additional copyright permissions from weeks to minutes.

Background

Since 1983, we at the CLA have been the recognised UK collective rights licensing body for text and images from book, journal and magazine content. We provide rights, content and licensing services to customers in the academic, professional and public sectors, and perform collective licensing on behalf of authors, publishers and other copyright owners.

With streamlined workflow systems and over 30 years' experience in our core markets, we are uniquely positioned to help content users to access, copy and share the content they need. And make sure copyright owners are paid the royalties they are due.

Higher education is one of our most important markets. Our Licence enables librarians and lecturers to copy a chapter of a book or a journal article for use by their students rather than having to go to the copyright holder to obtain permission on each occasion. However, under the licence there is a copying limit of one chapter or article in order to protect the rights of the copyright owner.

When the demand to purchase additional rights became apparent, we sought a solution to make the whole process easier for customers.

Adam Sewell, our IT Director explains, *"We are always keen to simplify the use of copyright material whenever possible. We realised that librarians who needed to source more than one chapter or article were involved in an onerous process where they would need to find out who had published the textbook or magazine, determine the correct contact at the publisher in order to request permission and negotiate a fee, then perhaps arrange for an additional licence – all of which could take weeks."*

A simple online solution

To transform this protracted process into a simple transaction, the best solution was to create a new bespoke platform accessed directly from our website where a customer can login and get an instant quote based on the number of students and the number of additional pages required. Then, if they are happy with the quote, they simply provide four additional fields of information to proceed, and receive the copyright permissions instantly, with billing done automatically.

Sewell explains, **"**I've worked with Advanced before, and I knew they could deliver this on the Microsoft Azure platform I wanted. They had built our check permissions application and underlying data mart which successfully replaced the previously title search application we were using before. It was an important project because we offer millions of titles, and customers need to find out in a matter of seconds if the publication they wish to reproduce material from is covered under their CLA licence. Advanced had created this data mart using a combination of open source and Microsoft technologies and I was confident they would have the skills, tools and understanding to successfully develop this new web application."*

A platform for a flexible future

The new application is built on the Azure platform. Developing such an application with a PaaS is a powerful and cost-efficient choice and it offers extensibility so that it can be scaled out should it reach the point where thousands of people are accessing the site. We selected

this model as it allowed us to cost-effectively run, develop and manage applications without the complexity of building and maintaining the infrastructure typically associated with developing and launching an application.

Sewell adds, *"We see this platform as the core of our future services. For example, we're using the Azure Active Directory to authenticate librarians using the system, and we'll be able to continue to use that for other services. We can then provide options such as single sign-on, and the ability to have a single profile across all our systems. Azure provides future-proofing, and will save us money going forward."*

The application is hosted in a hybrid cloud, where systems in the public cloud are talking to systems in our data centre. This means if another database is needed we can simply use the Azure database as a service - rather than building a SQL server, with all the time and money that entails. There is also no need to patch it, maintain back-ups and determine how to make it resilient as the underlying platform takes care of all those things.

Sewell says, *"I had no doubt that public cloud was the way to go, and in a few years I think it will be just like a utility and people won't even think about using it. Public cloud has proven itself to us as it has been really strong and resilient."*

Making a real difference to the customer experience

Our customers are already reaping the rewards of using the new site.

Sewell comments "*The new application has streamlined the process of buying a second extract, which now takes minutes instead of weeks. It offers flexible payment so there is no need to enter credit card details; one invoice is automatically generated at the end of the month. Incremental revenue is being generated for the publishers, with no extra input required on their part. With this latest development our customers continue to be reassured that we are constantly looking for ways to improve their efficiency around their use of content, saving them time and money."*

We have been able to make use of the application internally by interfacing it with Advanced Integra - our order management and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. All of our customers and their licence purchases are stored in Integra, and it also generates our invoices.

These details are now replicated in the Azure environment, so that when a purchase is made, the customer already has an account provisioned and invoicing is automated. It also integrates with SAP and the operations system which calculates distributions for the copyright owners based on what material is being used and by which organisations.

Conclusions

Eighty-six universities and more than a hundred major publishers have already signed up to the new service, and we are already considering other ways to utilise the platform. It can be used for any kind of additional licensing permission, not just further extracts, offering customers extra services under their CLA licence. For example, we recently launched a service to public sector bodies called Licence Plus which includes bundling units supplied by the British Library.

Sewell concludes: *"Advanced has successfully built a really strong, resilient and flexible platform that offers versatility and scope for many years to come. They listened to our current needs and future plans, and developed an innovative solution that is delivering immediate value to us and our customers with possibilities in the longer term. It is really about the collaborative relationship I have with the people there. Advanced is a good company to be in partnership with."*

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More information