

Enable modern business applications

Customer Solution Case Study



Customer: Mind Palette
Website: www.mindpl.com
Customer Size: 10 employees
Country or Region: Japan
Industry: Manufacturing—Software publishing

Customer Profile

Mind Palette, based in Tokyo, Japan, sells and supports the cute photo-sharing and photo-decorating app Snapeee, which is used by millions of young women in Japan and surrounding countries.

Software and Services

- Windows Azure platform
 - Windows Azure Infrastructure Services
 - Windows Azure Storage

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App Maker Cuts Database Costs 20 Percent by Switching to Windows Azure

“Now that we've put together a Linux environment on Windows Azure virtual machines, what strikes me most is how easy it is to use, with greater flexibility than I'd ever expected.”

Takamasa Kamio, Vice President and COO/CTO, Mind Palette

When downloads of the Mind Palette photo-sharing app Snapeee grew into the millions, operating costs ballooned for its Amazon Web Services (AWS) cloud-computing solution. Meanwhile, the company was trying to position itself for even greater growth, but it felt it needed more technical support than AWS engineers were providing. So Mind Palette switched to Windows Azure. Now database costs are almost 20 percent lower, support is readily available, and the company is confident that it can fulfil its potential.

Business Needs

Mind Palette is a cloud services vendor based in Tokyo, Japan, that develops and markets Snapeee, a smartphone picture-sharing app designed for young women who love Japan's unique aesthetic of *kawaii*, meaning “cute.” With Snapeee, users can take pictures with their phone, decorate them with playful stamps, lettering, and frames, and share them with friends on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.

When Mind Palette started developing Snapeee in October 2010 with a skeleton crew of two, it chose Amazon Web Services (AWS) as its cloud-computing platform in an effort to keep development

costs to a minimum. As part of the solution, Mind Palette initially used the AWS non-relational database SimpleDB as its key-value store for processing images. Later, when growing data volumes hit the 10-gigabyte (GB) table limit in SimpleDB, the company transitioned part of the data to another AWS non-relational database, DynamoDB. For the solution's aggregate analysis system, Mind Palette used the Amazon Relational Database Service with a MySQL open-source database engine.

Snapeee was released in May 2011, and downloads have been growing ever since. Today, Snapeee has around five million active users, mainly in Japan and surrounding countries, and Mind Palette is

developing collaboration plans with many companies in an effort to achieve even more growth in the future.

As the number of users grew, however, data volumes and operating costs ballooned. The AWS system became increasingly expensive, in part because of its pricing structure. "Data is read from these databases with a high level of frequency, and because SimpleDB payments are made based on computer time, the operating costs simply became too high," said Takamasa Kamio, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer/Chief Technology Officer of Mind Palette. In addition, Mind Palette, which is based in Japan, had to pay Amazon in US dollars. Mr. Kamio worried that this would make the service increasingly expensive as the value of the Japanese yen continued to weaken relative to the dollar.

Mr. Kamio was also concerned about the level of technical support provided by AWS. He said AWS engineers were highly skilled, but when Mind Palette had questions it often had to turn to the developer community instead of AWS for answers.

Mr. Kamio also wanted a system that was easy to program so that he could pass on programming duties to others in the future. "We want to continue providing Snapeee to our users for a long time to come, so obviously I can't be the only one who maintains it for the rest of my life," he said. "To eliminate this concern, we needed an environment with robust support from the service provider and a system that would allow efficient management, like with an enterprise system."

Solution

As Mind Palette considered what it wanted in its next cloud platform, Windows Azure emerged as the only real competitor to AWS. Mind Palette was attracted to Microsoft because its background in enterprise computing would help ensure that Windows Azure would be easy to administer. It also thought that the extensive Microsoft offering of products and services would give the company lots of options for the future. In addition, Mind

Palette thought the vast Microsoft partner network would make it easier to find technical support. "The large number of partners working with Microsoft that can provide us with development and operational support for Windows Azure is also reassuring," Mr. Kamio said.

In June 2013, Mind Palette chose a new solution based on Windows Azure Infrastructure Services and Windows Azure Storage. It includes a Linux environment built on Windows Azure virtual machines that use Windows Azure infrastructure as a service. For its key-value store, the new platform uses Azure Tables to replace AWS SimpleDB and DynamoDB. The transition was completed by the following July.

To help implement its new infrastructure, Mind Palette engaged a Microsoft partner based in Tokyo: PSC (for Power Staff Communications). Mr. Kamio was impressed with the passion and business acumen of Masayuki Suzuki, PSC Founder and Representative Director. "As we talked he told me, 'Leave the infrastructure up to me.' I don't need to tell you how reassuring that was," Mr. Kamio said.

Benefits

With Windows Azure, Mind Palette was able to save money without sacrificing performance. Its new system is easy to administer, technical help is readily available, and the company is confident that it has access to the technology it needs for future growth.

20 Percent Lower Costs

Since replacing AWS with Windows Azure, Mind Palette is saving almost 20 percent on database costs. That's because AWS billed on the basis of computing time, and payment was made in dollars. Mind Palette saves money with Windows Azure because bills for Azure Tables are based on total storage volume and storage transactions (the number of read and write operations to storage), and payment is made in the local currency, Japanese yen.

"The cost is lower, but performance is unaffected. Indeed, servers are available

that have higher specs than similarly priced systems, as far as server instances go. Payment is in yen, which is great for business management, since payment is not affected by exchange rate fluctuations," Mr. Kamio says.

Easy to Use and Maintain

Mr. Kamio says the Windows Azure solution is easy to use and flexible, allowing for the kind of efficient management found on enterprise systems. "Now that we've put together a Linux environment on Windows Azure virtual machines, what strikes me most is how easy it is to use, with greater flexibility than I'd ever expected. The costs of running a test environment two or three times are negligible, too," Mr. Kamio says. "Ease of use is vital for making future administration more efficient," he adds.

Mr. Kamio is also reassured by the large number of partners working closely with Microsoft that can provide development and operational support for Windows Azure. Mind Palette no longer has to dig up information itself to solve technical problems, but can get business-to-business help from Microsoft partners. "Now we can get B2B support, which is much more solid," Mr. Kamio says.

Better Prepared for the Future

The large number of enterprise products and services that Microsoft offers gives Mr. Kamio confidence for the future because Microsoft technology provides many choices, including hybrid configurations. "We now finally have an environment that will allow us to take our business to the next level," he says.

"As our company grows, we're going to have to use IT services for everything, starting with in-house infrastructure, naturally. When that happens, only Microsoft has the ability to offer us a file server or mail server infrastructure on-premises or in the cloud. Either way, we're happy that we were able to get an environment that offers so many choices," Mr. Kamio says.