

Professional Services Firm Takes SharePoint 2010 Practice into the Cloud

» Slalom Consulting, LLC, is a professional services firm that provides consulting, staffing, and recruiting services to Fortune 500 and midsize business clients throughout the U.S.

Slalom chose Skytap as the cloud platform to launch its SharePoint 2010 practice and offer innovative new cloud-based services ahead of its competitors. It now uses Skytap across its consulting business to offer clients more efficient services and improve technology collaboration across its nine US-based offices.

Situation

Launched in 1993, Slalom Consulting is a national management consulting and technology solutions firm and Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner. Headquartered in Seattle, Washington, Slalom maintains nine offices across the United States.

Michele Bleser is the director of technology for Slalom Consulting and her team delivers the technology platform to support 950 employees across 9 offices. Her team received constant requests for new prototyping and proof-of-concept IT environments to enable consultants to get a ‘head start’ on new technologies. These requests were manually intensive, which wasn’t a good use of time for her already stretched IT administrators. In addition, her team often didn’t have the hardware available to meet the requests. For the launch of a practice around SharePoint 2010, Bleser wanted to implement a ‘private cloud’ to enable self-service provisioning of data center resources and the ability for rapid training and prototyping. Bleser started investigating solutions that could automate the provisioning of IT environments and would enable her team to:

- Enable distributed consulting teams to collaborate and share work in a virtualized data center, whether a client location, home or Slalom Consulting office.
- Provide a central library of ‘best practice’ server templates for client use and training
- Provide self-service access to virtual IT environments, thus avoiding lost consultant productivity
- Automate the set-up and tear-down of new environments, including the ability to clone existing templates
- Avoid hiring new IT operations team members and costly technology training

» CUSTOMER PROFILE

Based in Seattle, Washington, Slalom Consulting, LLC, a professional services firm that provides consulting, staffing, and recruiting services to Fortune 500 and midsize business clients throughout the U.S.

» CHALLENGES

- No central repository for pre-built ‘best practice’ server configurations
- Time consuming provisioning of IT infrastructure due to manual processes
- Limited IT staff to support US consulting practice
- No ability to quickly scale project infrastructure with consulting demand
- Customers required to purchase ‘proof-of-concept’ environments for projects

» SOLUTION

Slalom Consulting adopted Skytap as its cloud platform across all its US offices.

» BENEFITS

- Provisioning time for new consulting environments now immediate (vs. 1-2 weeks previously)
- Improved team collaboration between US consulting offices
- Ability to scale consulting infrastructure according to project demand
- 60% Total of Cost of Ownership (TCO) reduction compared to internal infrastructure

» CUSTOMER HIGHLIGHTS

“Cloud computing is a game-changing capability that can improve business agility and reduce costs. By adopting Skytap’s technology, we’ve streamlined our own business and gained leading-edge skills to help our clients adopt cloud services.”

Tony Rojas, President of Slalom Consulting

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Challenges

Bleser had briefly considered buying hardware and implementing her own 'private cloud' solution. However, given her firm's lean operational mindset and the likely capital expense and investment in new headcount and technology training, she wanted to avoid this option if at all possible. Additionally, she'd seen how different teams often competed for internal infrastructure and worried about being able to scale capacity to meet demand.

"Given the industry shift to cloud computing, I wanted to see if we could utilize a cloud service to provide a 'virtual private cloud' and the collaboration tools we required", said Bleser. "We explored some 'Infrastructure-as-a-Service' offerings, but quickly realized these didn't offer a way to centrally implement policies and cost control, or offer us the rich team collaboration capabilities we needed. In addition, they lacked an easy way to share 'best practice' server templates across our consulting field."

Solution

Bleser discovered Skytap during her research and quickly discovered that it offered significant advantages over other providers. "I discovered that with Skytap we could run existing software environments completely unchanged, without the operating system or machine limitations imposed by other cloud providers", said Bleser. "In addition, Skytap has the ability to automatically 'network fence' different IT environments so our consultants can spin up the same server templates and not interfere with each other."

Slalom Consulting signed up for a Skytap account and tested the cloud service that day. "The great thing about cloud computing is there is very little risk", said Bleser. "We could validate Skytap was the right for us and then scale to service out to our consulting field effortlessly. It's just not possible to do that when you build your own private cloud."

Within a week, Bleser's team had rolled out Skytap accounts to the SharePoint 2010 practice team members. "It was a very fast deployment and our consultants were productive almost immediately", said Bleser. "The amazing thing to watch was how consultants in different geographic locations could collaborate in cloud-based virtual data centers so easily."

Benefits

Given the success of the SharePoint 2010 roll-out, Slalom Consulting has expanded its use of Skytap across the entire consulting business. "Our consultants now use Skytap for client projects using a broad range of vendor technology, including Oracle CRM, Microsoft Office Servers and custom .NET and Silverlight development", said Bleser. "They can quickly prototype a solution with a client and share it over the Web using Skytap's Resource Links. It means the client doesn't have to invest in project-based development and test infrastructure and we can utilize a very agile approach to projects. It's revolutionized the way we deliver technology services."

Specific benefits Slalom Consulting experienced with Skytap include:

- Provisioning time for new consulting 'sandbox' environments now immediate (vs. 1-2 weeks previously)
- Improved team collaboration between US consulting offices using Skytap's cloud-based virtual data centers
- Ability to scale consulting infrastructure according to project demand
- On-demand demonstration and 'proof-of-concept' environments for client pitches
- Central library of 'best practice' server templates
- 60% Total of Cost of Ownership (TCO) reduction compared to internal infrastructure

» CUSTOMER HIGHLIGHTS

"Skytap enabled us to launch our SharePoint 2010 practice in a matter of days. We now have a central 'best practices' repository for all our US consultants. Skytap's cloud service and utility billing gives me the ability to keep my IT team lean and highly leveraged, while keeping IT costs aligned with the business."

Michele Bleser, Director of Technology,
Slalom Consulting

» To learn how Skytap can deliver value to your organization, contact a cloud computing expert at sales@skytap.com or call us at +1 (888) 759-8278