



Transforming into a Cloud Business: A Pragmatic Works Story

Overview

There are numerous benefits associated with moving an organization's IT to the cloud. But the decision to move to the cloud can be daunting and the process of moving can be intimidating. The cloud is disruptive to business as usual, and the move impacts not just IT systems, but the people who support them.

Pragmatic Works leverages its experience and expertise to help businesses migrate to the cloud with Microsoft Azure. Pragmatic Works' knowledge goes beyond just training and certification; over the past two years, the company has made its own transition from on premises to the cloud. Pragmatic Works is able to share its experiences and lessons learned with those considering the move.

The cloud disrupts business as usual.

Moving to the cloud offers a number of operational and financial advantages. Five key benefits are:



For a further discussion of the benefits, see Pragmatic Works' blog post, "[Why Your Infrastructure Belongs in the Cloud.](#)"

The benefits of moving to the cloud far outweigh the drawbacks and make the move to the cloud worthwhile. However, the cloud represents a significant change. It disrupts business as usual and requires companies to revisit how they do business.

Three big adaptations that Pragmatic Works made when moving to the cloud were around:

- **Trust.** The company made the decision to put trust in Microsoft as its public cloud vendor.
- **Availability.** With its applications in the cloud, Pragmatic Works needed to consider what would happen if there were internet connectivity issues or when applications or data were unavailable. Pragmatic Works also needed to consider system resiliency.
- **Control.** IT professionals who have been responsible for managing on-premises systems need to give up some control to cloud vendors. This includes database administrators (DBAs) who, in the past, were ultimately responsible for managing data and ensuring it performs well for the organization.

“This was not an overnight transformation. We didn’t all of a sudden make the switch to Azure.”

Steve Hughes, Pragmatic Works

Pragmatic Works made the journey from a SQL Server focus to an Azure focus.

Pragmatic Works was initially founded in 2007 as a training, consulting, and business intelligence (BI) solutions firm. While the company initially focused on SQL Server, Pragmatic Works has now successfully evolved to a business with services focused on Azure. Steps in this journey are described below.

2007	2011	2013	2016	Today
Pragmatic Works is founded. The company focuses on training, consulting, and BI solutions with SQL Server.	Expands capabilities and offerings to match the expanding SQL Server stack. Focuses on helping make BI a reality for as many organizations as possible.	Embraced Power Pivot and SharePoint BI. Added free training on Tuesdays and Thursdays to help companies understand Microsoft solutions.	Introduced the Data Lifecycle Optimization framework to have a more holistic conversation with customers around their stage of maturity within the data lifecycle.	Pragmatic Works is a cloud company offering cloud solutions and has made the jump to Microsoft Azure.

Pragmatic Works hasn't abandoned its past; it still offers on-premises solutions with SQL Server for clients who need it. But Pragmatic Works' primary focus is now on cloud-based solutions in Azure because of the benefits that Azure offers clients.

Employees were given the tools and technology to transform with the business.

As a consulting company, one of the most critical areas for transformation for Pragmatic Works was with its people. Over the course of two years, while consultants were still working with customers on SQL Server projects, consultants were provided training and tools that allowed them to learn about Azure, in-depth, so they could confidently discuss and implement it at client sites.

In 2018, Pragmatic Works set the goal of ensuring that all employees were certified in Azure. Certification in Azure is a challenge, as Microsoft changes certification quarterly, sometimes dropping exam sets from its offerings. But the reason for this goal was to show that Pragmatic Works' consultants all have the necessary expertise to keep up with the ever-changing Azure landscape.

Today, Pragmatic Works' employees are experts in Azure. They are creating Azure training for Microsoft for its Azure Data Factory labs and have created Azure Data Warehouse bootcamps for partners.

“A key part of transforming our business was upgrading our people’s skills”

Steve Hughes, Pragmatic Works

Sales and marketing changed its offerings to keep up with Azure development.

Before the move to Azure, Pragmatic Works had published more than 30 books on SQL Server technologies. With the shift to Azure, sales and marketing had to develop and share new types of industry thought leadership—such as online videos and webinars—that allowed the company to be seen as credible and knowledgeable regarding Azure offerings.

Today, Pragmatic Works' marketing content and sales offerings focus on Azure opportunities, including Azure migrations, Azure Data Warehouse solutions, and Azure and Power BI Managed Services.



Pragmatic Works has embraced the cloud and PaaS solutions internally.

Pragmatic Works recognized that in addition to recommending and delivering cloud-based solutions to clients, it needed to embrace cloud and related Platform as a Service (PaaS) solutions internally. Beyond using what the company recommends and delivers to clients, the move to the cloud has allowed for improved organizational collaboration and optimization.

Making the move to the cloud-based Microsoft 365 has given the Pragmatic Works' business a platform for email, collaboration, workflow, and reporting. Employees have moved from using Slack and Yammer group messaging platforms to Microsoft Teams, which has created a single location for all discussions, including knowledge sharing that can help consultants better serve clients.

Pragmatic Works is also in the process of moving its own applications to the cloud with Azure services. When possible, the company is moving off of virtual machines (VMs) and Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) solutions to cloud-based PaaS environments. For example, Pragmatic Works has eliminated SQL Server Reporting Services and the associated VMs and has moved to Power BI in the cloud.

Businesses need to decide if they are ready to move to the cloud.

The cloud is already here, and even large enterprises, like Walmart and Chevron, are moving their IT applications and infrastructure to Microsoft Azure. Despite being the clear choice for the future, some businesses still struggle with the decision to move to the cloud.

PRAGMATIC WORKS AZURE EVERY DAY

In February 2018, Pragmatic Works introduced the [Azure Every Day](#) blog and video series. Every day of the week this offering provides short, consumable videos that help viewers move their careers or strategies forward using data in the cloud.

Businesses need to look at both the challenges they are facing as they consider the move to the cloud, and the many benefits the cloud offers. Common concerns include:

- **Security.** This is usually a political and legal issue, not a technical one. Microsoft is serious about security, and its introduction of SQL Managed Instances is a highly secure version of their PaaS.
- **Team readiness.** Moving to the cloud may require new knowledge and skills, beyond what IT staff have today. For example, a DBA will need to understand networking, which they did not have to know with on-premises databases. Having been through this migration, Pragmatic Works can help teams prepare and can provide appropriate tools and training.

Moving to the cloud isn't done all at once. Businesses can start simply, moving only those things their team is ready to take on or that provide immediate benefit to the business. Initial steps can include accessing advanced analytics in Azure, using PaaS to reduce the overall dependency on hardware and software management, or scaling up to meet increasing data needs in the organization.

Conclusion

Organizations see the important benefits the cloud provides and are making the decision to migrate to the cloud. Pragmatic Works offers extensive support in this move. This involves designing solutions and platforms for the cloud, as well as providing training and practical advice based on the company's own experiences moving to Azure.

Learn More

Steve Hughes writes about data, business analytics, and the SQL Server community at his blog, [Data on Wheels](#).

To learn more about Pragmatic Works, go to: www.pragmaticworks.com.

PRAGMATIC WORKS TODAY

Pragmatic Works has made a successful jump to Azure. As of December 2018:

- The company was in the **top 0.5% of Global Microsoft Partners** on Azure and had achieved gold partner status for data platform, cloud platform, and data analytics.
- **95%** of Pragmatic Works' consultants had Azure certification.
- **More than 80%** of all 2018 contracts were Azure based, up 10% from 2017.
- **Azure Every Day** had been posted every weekday since February 1.
- Pragmatic Works' October Azure Data Week online conference had **more than 1,400 registered attendees** and presenters from both Pragmatic Works and Microsoft.