



Enabling smart, scalable cloud systems to serve content and community to 80 million home cooks



The Challenge

- Enable fast access to the world's largest food community
- Maintain high availability of systems while scaling to accommodate dramatic seasonal increases in traffic
- Reduce costs of maintaining hosted datacenters, required to be designed and managed to handle peak traffic at all times
- Create a modern production infrastructure that could scale on demand and accommodate new technologies
- Partner with a technology resource to transform and optimize software performance for cloud-based systems



The Solution

- Capitalize on Azure capabilities with the support of a proven Microsoft partner
- Create a team to act in partnership, evaluating needs for digital transition of the company
- Re-architect software to capitalize on modern cloud capabilities and flexible Platform as a Service (PaaS) technologies
- Secure greater sponsored funding through Neudesic's close relationship with Microsoft



The Benefit

- Reduced hardware footprint enables long-term cost savings, eliminating direct hardware expenditures and associated maintenance
- Site is poised to accommodate new platforms and technologies required by industry acquisitions
- Development staff is more strategic and proactive rather than focused on lower level day-to-day tasks
- Built-in Azure value improves licensing structure, now simpler and more cost effective
- Security patching demands are eliminated from internal staff, and instead inherent to the cloud system
- Scalable PaaS architecture is proven for additional Meredith Digital properties such as dish.com and eatingwell.com
- Digital Operations teams are able to better leverage third-party monitoring services to more easily track real time site performance

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The Client

Allrecipes fosters a unique community for home cooks, offering recipes and a vibrant social experience, energizing visitors with confidence and community support to help succeed in their cooking goals. As part of Meredith Digital, the company is the world's largest digital food brand with a worldwide audience of over 80 million home cooks, exceeding a billion and a half customer touchpoints annually across digital, print, television, online and integrated platforms.



The Challenge

Allrecipes is a resource that home cooks rely on consistently, returning week after week for guidance in meal planning and inspiration for their overall cooking behavior. “Our vision is really to help home cooks discover and share the joy of home cooking, whether it’s a holiday meal for 20 or a typical Tuesday night dinner,” said Esmee Williams, vice president of consumer and brand strategy, Allrecipes. “We create experiences geared towards empowering home cooks for whatever their daily cooking journey holds.” Unlike other digital food resources, Allrecipes provides an end-to-end experience, with superior food-focused content such as recipes, reviews, photos, and profiles available to users at their precise time of need and through the medium of their choice. “Our brand plays a role in their lives, guiding users through the shopping process with local offers, favorite foods and built-in, step-by-step recipes. We’ve extended that value even further by creating a social community where they can have real conversations about food, reaching out to friends, family and other cooks to share their food experiences and inspiration,” added Williams.

To scale such high-level engagement and readily meet home cooks at their moment in need, Allrecipes depends on a robust technology infrastructure capable of handling peak traffic at all times. “Reliability and responsiveness is our mandate, yet dramatic spikes in traffic are inherent in our engagement model,” said John Keane, chief technology officer, Allrecipes. “The day before Thanksgiving we might handle a month’s worth of traffic in a single day. While our datacenters were optimized to handle this kind of peak traffic, we recognized the need for a more efficient solution that could scale down during non-peak periods.” Allrecipes needed to embrace a new cloud-based technology solution, reducing capital expenditures on hardware and long-term operational costs associated with maintaining a datacenter. “Getting relief from the datacenter was just one challenge. Modernizing our technology, infrastructure and ecommerce platforms was as critical – we needed highly scalable, on-demand performance to help us to maintain the continued pace of growth we’re seeing both organically and by industry acquisition,” said Keane.

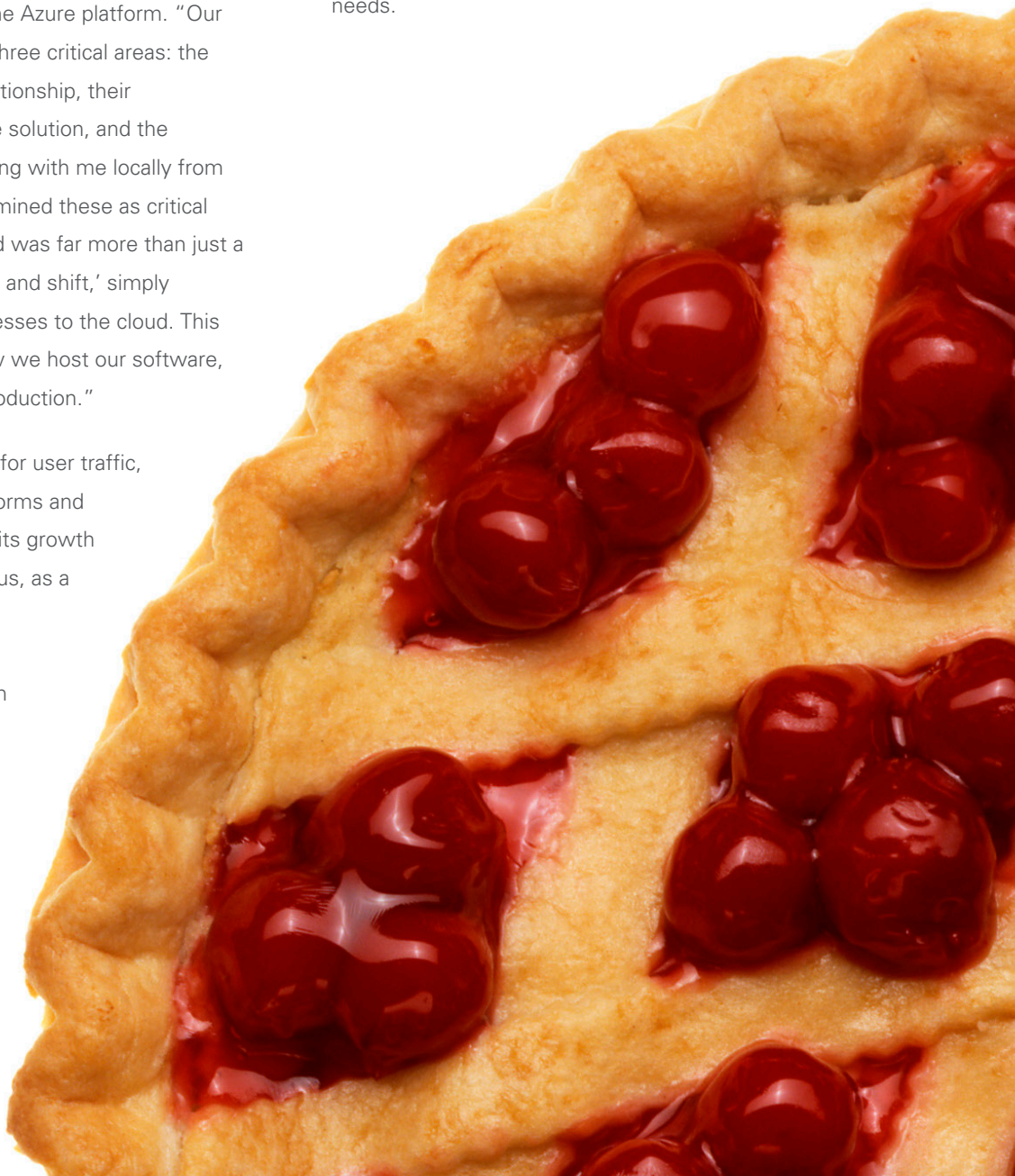
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The Solution

Allrecipes sought a true technology and strategy partner who could transform its dense datacenter architecture into a cloud-based ecosystem, improving performance today and positioning the company as a digital powerhouse for the long-term. “We needed a partner to integrate seamlessly with our own agile development processes – someone working side by side with our established team protocols rather than overburdening processes with a too rigid approach,” said Keane. With Neudesic, Allrecipes found a collaborative team of professionals, buoyed by a longstanding partnership with Microsoft and adept at implementing the Azure platform. “Our engagement with Neudesic rested on three critical areas: the quality and depth of their Microsoft relationship, their demonstrated competency in the Azure solution, and the exceptional nature of their staff, engaging with me locally from the start,” said Keane. Allrecipes determined these as critical advantages, given the operation at hand was far more than just a cloud migration. “This is not a basic ‘lift and shift,’ simply moving enterprise operations and processes to the cloud. This effort has been a transformation of how we host our software, how it behaves, and how we handle production.”

Allrecipes not only needed to right-size for user traffic, but also to prepare for the various platforms and technologies coming on board through its growth strategy. “Azure really made sense for us, as a marketplace where many of these technologies are offered as a Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS), rather than needing to be implemented into a datacenter,” said Keane. The entire effort encompassed reworking processes, operations, software architectures, security protocols and more – specifically optimizing performance for the cloud with emphasis on redesign and modernization.

Adopting Azure was poised to create massive organizational impact. “Neudesic’s Managed Services team knew that the actual design of our implementation was the most critical factor in its successful deployment. They knew the ‘gotchas’ to avoid and ultimately helped our internal team increase its Azure knowledge.” Neudesic’s approach oversaw the entire architectural design at a high level, including a full-time manager/consultant along with a team of proven Azure engineers. By implementing ExpressRoute, the team ensured a fast method of connecting Azure vs a standard VPN, quickly accommodating the full spectrum of Allrecipes’ data needs.



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The Benefit

After transitioning business operations to the Azure platform, Allrecipes significantly reduced its portfolio of hardware assets and capital outlays from a maintenance, personnel, and equipment perspective. “Working with Neudesic, we focused on the architecture and PaaS strategy upfront, considering what the solution would look like down the road and creating a governance structure as the key piece to smart deployment,” said Keane. “Scalability was not an afterthought. Neudesic ensured that our cloud transformation incorporated auto-scaling as an essential foundation, woven into the environment and PaaS model from the outset.”

“There is no longer a need to dedicate hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to expensive physical resources,” said Keane. “Additionally we secured cost savings from Azure’s simplified licensing model, where previously we had to allocate significant resources for purchasing and managing the licenses of SQL Server and other software.” As a Microsoft Partner of the Year, Neudesic was also able to facilitate a larger percentage of cost sharing from the software giant, which is atypical in Azure commitments.

The transition to a cloud architecture has allowed the Allrecipes IT team to shift from its inherently tactical and process-oriented posture to a far more strategic position. “We no longer have to waste resources keeping the datacenter in shape. Azure gives us seamless integration with our C++ development skills and easy transition from our Digital Studio environment,” said Keane. “With Azure providing the hosting environment, we also have access to a rich set of Cortana Analytics tools. The stage is set for us to move toward machine learning, incorporating dynamic recommendations for users based on any number of unique, personal aspects of their cooking journey – what time of day it is, weather, or preferences such as spicy or vegan food. It’s a much more strategic use of our development resources, and will continue to help us distinguish customized, end-to-end



experiences for users.” Using the Allrecipes transition as a template for fast, efficient digital transformation, additional Meredith Digital properties such as eatingwell.com and dish.com are undertaking a similar digital evolution.



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