

ASCENT TECHNOLOGY HELPS MIGRATE PHUMELELA GAMING TO MICROSOFT AZURE



A Windows Server and SQL Server consolidation, optimisation and migration to Microsoft Azure enables the company to reduce costs, modernise its data platform and boost its innovation capabilities.

As an operator running two distinct betting businesses, Phumelela Gaming found itself in a position where it was operating two different line of business infrastructure and application stacks. Thus, when the time approached for the business to consider a hardware refresh, Phumelela chose to undertake a major consolidation and optimisation exercise.

Phumelela Gaming and Leisure Limited is licensed to operate horseracing in seven of South Africa's nine provinces and provides the totalisator platform which enables pari-mutuel betting across southern Africa and beyond. Phumelela operates two key brands – namely Tab, a pari-mutuel wagering business, and Betting World which is a fixed odds operator.

According to Derrick Attfield, Group CIO at Phumelela, the key reason for bringing the two businesses' IT departments together was to significantly reduce the complexity of the environment. He adds that since the fundamental technologies being used were Microsoft ones, the company also sought to simplify by implementing only Microsoft technologies, further taking advantage of the existing Microsoft skills within the two IT departments.

"Furthermore, we were coming due for a hardware refresh, and had decided that the benefits of the cloud were too good to ignore, so we wanted to plan a migration to Microsoft Azure. The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown did, however, dramatically speed up the need to move to the cloud," he says, adding that the company turned to its advisor, Ascent Technology, to assist with this strategy.

Attfield explains that with Betting World and Tab running on separate, independent platforms from an infrastructure point of view, the company was experiencing additional and unnecessary overheads, complexity and costs.

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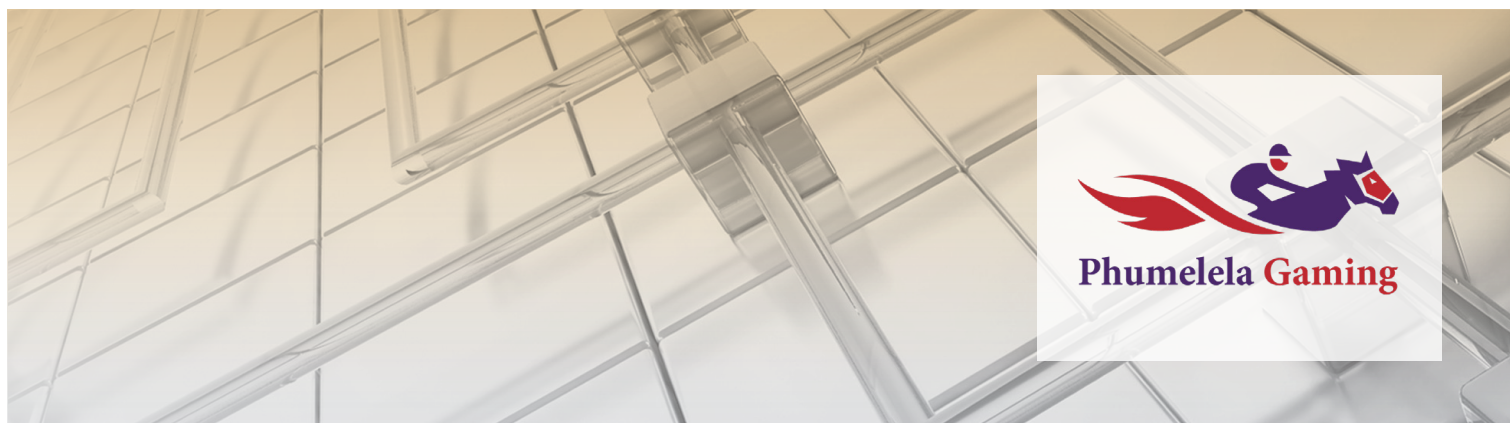
Derrick Attfield, Group CIO at Phumelela ”

the easier it becomes to provide better services to your customers. Further, we understood that simplifying our IT environment would make it easier to secure and enable us to innovate and adapt more rapidly. As an organisation that has worked with our data platform environment for numerous years, Ascent Technology was the obvious choice to assist here.”

“Ascent not only has significant experience with data platform migration and consolidation projects, but the company is vastly experienced with Microsoft solutions, which means they were also well placed to assist with the migration to the Azure. The unexpected Covid-19 pandemic then raised additional challenges, but thanks to the support we received from both Microsoft and

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Ascent, we were well able to meet these as well.”

Part of the reason for Phumelela adopting Azure as its cloud platform of choice was, he explains, because at the time Microsoft was the only vendor that had locally-sited data centres. This placed them in the unique position of being the only vendor that could provide geo-redundancy and the properly structured, robust architecture required to deal with matters of data sovereignty.

“With this in mind, we took a strategic decision to strengthen and expand our relationship with Microsoft specifically, feeling it would be counterproductive to our consolidation objective to retain the additional complexity created by operating multiple vendor platforms,” states Attfield.

Discussing the impact of Covid-19 on the project, he indicates that when the lockdown was announced, the organisation quickly realised that this would significantly impact the way customers chose to place their bets.

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“With the option to visit our shops to place bets removed by the lockdown, we would need to be able to adapt, according to the predicted customer utilisation of the platform.”

“In other words, we needed to be able to scale rapidly to meet user demand. This requirement was highlighted best with the running of the July Handicap, where the online betting requirements were an order of magnitude higher than usual. Essentially, you could say that Covid-19 created exceptional circumstances, but fortunately Azure provided us with exceptional technology to deal with these challenges,” he states.

Ascent really stepped up to the plate with this project, continues Attfield, pointing out that as a Microsoft CSP Direct Partner and a trusted advisor to Phumelela, the strong relationship built over several years meant that everyone involved in the project played their role perfectly. “In fact, the IT teams from both Tab and Betting World, as well as Ascent’s own people, worked together so effectively that the migration was completed within a week.”

According to Johan Lamberts, MD of Ascent Technology, the company is pleased to be considered a key partner by Phumelela and excited by its move to the Azure platform.

“We are really pleased to have built on the long relationship we have with Phumelela, and to have an organisation of their stature as a customer. Moreover, we look forward to continuing our efforts to maintain and improve their data platform environment, and – as we look towards the next phase of optimisation and modernisation – we certainly anticipate a fruitful relationship for many years to come,” he says.

Attfield suggests that this next phase will focus mainly on the continual cycle of cost optimisation, as well as the move to a cloud-first modernised architecture.

“The modernisation part will entail moving from infrastructure as a service (IaaS) in Azure to platform as a service (PaaS), and while this will offer the opportunity for additional cost optimisation, the real goal is to have the appropriate compute capacity available at the appropriate and required time.”

“Even more crucially, we want to be able to respond far more rapidly to changes and this requires the ability to innovate quickly and effectively. The flexibility of Azure is such that – working closely with Ascent – we expect the next phase of the modernisation process will drive even greater value for us and enable even greater heights of innovation,” he concludes.