SAP on Microsoft Azure Keeps Utility Flowing

Loudoun Water provides drinking water and wastewater services to over 80,000 households in Loudoun County, Virginia, one of the fastest-growing counties in the country. A political subdivision of the State, the utility receives income through customer user fees, which go towards operating expenses, and developer fees, which are used to pay for capital improvements. Loudoun Water's mission is to ensure a healthy environment and high quality of life through the effectiveness and sustainable management of resources entrusted to its care. For more information, visit: https://www.loudounwater.org

CHALLENGE

To transition and manage the hosting of Loudoun Water's SAP on Azure environment, both smoothly and cost-effectively, while establishing a productive alliance with the niche SAP consulting firm taking the lead on the broader RFP.

OUTCOME

Syntax leveraged specialty expertise in SAP Basis support, Microsoft Azure hosting, and the Utilities sector to assume SAP on Azure hosting, working effectively in concert with Utegration's AMS support team to address Loudoun Water's comprehensive needs.

Loudoun Water	**HQ:** Ashburn, VA	**INDUSTRY:** Public Utility

Loudoun Water Seeks SAP Support and Azure Hosting Expertise

One of the fastest-growing counties in the country, Loudoun County, VA, relies on Loudoun Water for its drinking water and wastewater services, mainly in eastern Loudoun County outside of incorporated towns. Loudoun Water maintains over 1,483 miles of water distribution pipelines, over 1,234 miles of wastewater collection system pipelines, and a growing reclaimed non-potable water system.

Loudoun Water relies on SAP ERP Central Component (SAP ECC) for Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), having moved SAP from on-premises to Microsoft Azure in 2018. As a steward of both natural and financial resources, Loudoun Water regularly seeks competitive bidding for its information technology (IT) contracts as they approach expiration. Loudoun Water issued an RFP focused on hosting its SAP on the Microsoft Azure environment and providing Application Management Services (AMS) for SAP. Of paramount importance to Kevin Allder, SAP Applications Manager with Loudoun Water, was to look beyond a dedicated resource model to a more cost-effective shared support model while better leveraging the in-house SAP team.

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PRODUCTS & SERVICES IMPLEMENTED

- SAP on Azure Hosting
- SAP Support Services | SAP Basis Support

TECHNOLOGY FOOTPRINT

- SAP ERP Central Component (SAP ECC)
- SAP Cloud Connector
- SAP Customer Relationship Management (CRM)
- SAP Gateway (GW)
- SAP Process Orchestration (PO)
- SAP Solution Manager
- Windows Operating System
- Microsoft SQL Server
- Multiple Third-Party Applications

Syntax | Utegration Align for a Winning Solution

Utegration, a niche SAP consulting firm specializing in the Utilities sector, was in the process of proposing AMS support to Loudoun Water and approached Syntax to provide the SAP on Azure hosting and SAP Basis support as it relates to the operating system (OS) and database.

Loudoun Water had an established relationship with Microsoft and experience with Azure. To move the Azure hosting relationship, Loudoun Water would need to shift from running underneath the incumbent provider's managed services environment to their own and wanted a service provider to manage it remotely, taking over the operations management.

Syntax provided documented use cases of SAP on Azure hosting and showcased relevant experience with SAP cloud hosting for other utilities that were peers to Loudoun Water. With a long history of cloud hosting and SAP support, Syntax brought a depth of knowledge that made it an attractive resource for Loudoun Water.

Together, Syntax and Utegration made a compelling case to address the full scope of Loudoun Water's request for proposal (RFP). The decision was made to move forward with this new relationship.

"It gave us a great deal of confidence knowing that with Syntax, we were getting a team that could answer any question we had."

Kevin Allder
SAP Applications Manager
Loudoun Water

Experience and Adaptability Drive Smooth Transition

The transition from the incumbent provider to Utegration/Syntax followed a proven methodology that included workshops with the incumbent provider and workshops with the Loudoun Water ITS team. This was followed by a shadowing period while the incumbent provider was still in charge, then a cutover where the Syntax and Utegration team were reverse-shadowed.

The successful Utegration/Syntax alliance was possible because both parties were committed to addressing the needs of Loudoun Water and demonstrated flexibility and adaptability to make that happen. In the midst of a pandemic, the transition meetings were all conducted remotely through Microsoft Teams in half-day increments rather than live in full-day increments, which is customary. The transition process was also commenced earlier on the calendar to accommodate this change in plans while staying committed to the desired takeover date.

From an infrastructure perspective, the Azure operations team at Syntax assumed the responsibility of creating, updating, deleting, monitoring, maintaining, and patching of the Azure infrastructure for Loudoun Water. "This included most of the network piece, all of the virtual machine (VM) infrastructure, and monitoring," explained Patrick Bingham, Azure Senior Systems Engineer with Syntax. As Loudoun Water moved from the incumbent provider's Azure subscription to their own subscription, Syntax optimized the backup retention point storage to deliver a more cost-effective solution. Syntax utilized Azure Site Recovery for their replication and disaster recovery testing and Azure Automation for operating system (OS) patching. The Syntax team uses Azure Monitor for alerts and Azure Bastion for remote access to monitor the system.

Shifting from a quarterly schedule to a monthly schedule for patching, Syntax keeps Loudoun Water more current, hence more secure. Patching is done on a regular, repeatable basis, adapting to client scheduling needs as necessary and minimizing the burden on Loudoun Water end users. The Syntax scope of work includes providing 24/7 on-call support, responding to tickets or alerts as required.

The SAP team at Syntax provides the Basis technical support, responsible for the servers in terms of daily SAP support. The Syntax Basis team works with Utegration as requests and incidents come in from Loudoun Water, collectively providing broad support of the SAP environment.

From an SAP perspective, it is customary to review opportunities with a customer to improve the system periodically, and for Loudoun Water, this typically occurs near year-end. Early in the relationship, Utegration and the Syntax SAP team worked closely to accomplish the review and the resulting body of work, receiving positive feedback from Loudoun Water.

The Syntax Basis support team also performed a significant upgrade of BSI tax software that was soon to expire. Syntax worked diligently to document the entire process, then upgraded the subsequent systems—SAP QAS (Quality Assurance System) and Production System—to successfully complete the upgrade before expiration.

"Successfully making this transition virtually, in the middle of a pandemic, was truly amazing."

Kevin Allder
SAP Applications Manager
Loudoun Water

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Timely Alliance Delivers Comprehensive Support

- Utegration/Syntax successfully transitioned the SAP on Azure hosting and SAP AMS support on schedule, despite adapting from a live to a fully remote transition process.
- Syntax optimized the backup retention point storage to deliver a more cost-effective SAP on Azure solution, reducing this cost component by over 40%.
- Shifting from a quarterly to monthly patching schedule keeps Loudoun Water more current, more secure.
- Beyond ongoing Basis support, Syntax was flexible to take on critical projects, including third-party software upgrades in Loudoun Water's SAP ecosystem.
- Responding to a Priority One (P1) incident, Syntax was recognized by Loudoun Water for its adaptability to failover and the expedience with which Syntax leveraged the appropriate human resources from across the US, Mexico, Canada, and beyond to take action.

"Knowing that I have solid 24-hour support with Syntax watching out for me helps me sleep at night."

Kevin Allder
SAP Applications Manager
Loudoun Water

WHY SYNTAX

Syntax provides comprehensive technology solutions to businesses of all sizes with over 800 customers trusting Syntax with their IT services and ERP needs. Today, Syntax is a leading Managed Cloud Provider for Mission Critical Enterprise Applications. Syntax has undisputed strength to implement and manage ERP deployments (Oracle, SAP) in a secure, resilient, private, public or hybrid cloud. With strong technical and functional consulting services, and world class monitoring and automation, Syntax serves corporations across a diverse range of industries and markets. Syntax has offices worldwide, and partners with SAP, Oracle, AWS, Microsoft, IBM, HPE, and other global technology leaders. Learn more about Syntax at www.syntax.com.

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