

Washington Municipality Chooses Drama-Free Microsoft & DataON

Stevens County Starts its Microsoft Hybrid Cloud Journey



Customer

Stevens County (WA) Information Services

Solutions & Services

Azure Stack HCI

Azure Hybrid Services

Industry

State & Local Government

Organization Size

201-500

Location

Stevens County, WA, USA



Everyone knows a good story has to have conflict. This one doesn't. Everyone knows a good story is packed with drama. This one isn't. Instead, the story we're here to tell is strangely uncomplicated, refreshingly drama-free. This is a story where everything went right.

In a nutshell:

- Guys meet at an industry event and have dinner together.
- Guys hit it off and agree to stay in touch.
- Guy eventually realizes the other guy can help him with his data center.
- Guy helps the other guy start his journey to Microsoft hybrid cloud.

That's it. That's the whole story. But you want details so let's start with those guys from Washington state.

The Customer: Stevens County

Stevens County, Washington, has a population of roughly 48,000. It sits in a beautiful spot just north of Spokane and stretches all the way up to the Canada-US border. Created in 1863, the county was named after Isaac Stevens, the first governor of Washington Territory. The County's Information Services team – a group of about 12, eight of whom sit on the tech side – serves roughly 600 users. **Trevor Sellars** is the team's Director of Information Services while **Andrew Padilla** is their Infrastructure and Operations Manager.

The Challenge: Simplify & Control Costs

Sellars and Padilla's Information Services team is tasked with handling all IT service needs for Stevens County's 600 or so employees. "We've got 81 VMs running," says Padilla. "We've got everything – print servers, file servers, network access control stuff, Citrix, financial servers, syslogs, our physical security, VPN servers, GIS. You name it."

The Challenge

- Move away from a traditional SAN to a hyper-converged infrastructure (HCI)
- Start hybrid cloud journey and take advantage of Azure hybrid services
- Eliminate IT bottlenecks and improve SQL application performance
- Ensure business continuity while adding a disaster recovery strategy

The Solution

- Azure Stack HCI for Microsoft hybrid cloud infrastructure
- Azure hybrid cloud services can extend their capabilities to include monitoring & management, virtual desktop infrastructure, containers, security, and backup & disaster recovery

The Result

- An encouraging start to their hybrid cloud journey
- A smart move for today and good preparation for tomorrow
- A simpler infrastructure consolidated into an integrated solution
- Better, easier budgeting process
- Support from DataON “people I can count on”

At first the team merely wanted to upgrade their equipment. But they began thinking more deeply about how their investment could help them prepare for the future. They began looking at hybrid cloud solutions that could simplify their IT infrastructure while controlling costs. They fell in love with words like *turnkey* and *autopilot*.

Sellars and Padilla also saw hybrid cloud as a possible future option for backup and disaster recovery. “Historically we’ve had a secondary site in town,” Sellars says. “But we can’t really afford to keep a hot or even warm site available at that cost. That’s why we started exploring cloud-based recovery options. We haven’t implemented them yet, but we are looking.”

Their Cisco UCS (Unified Computing System) was due for replacement, so the team took advantage of a Washington State grant program and got busy figuring out how to replace their old infrastructure. “We were already looking at moving away from our SAN to reduce the number of things that could go wrong,” Sellars recalls. “We got a heads up that they might soon price us out. We were not optimistic about the future of UCS in our environment.”

Solution: Microsoft Hybrid Cloud with Azure Stack HCI

Sellars and Padilla came to a clear conclusion: Microsoft had the right infrastructure for their team and their users. “My thought was that we were already moving a lot of stuff to Microsoft with 365 and Azure,” Padilla says. “Having something that would tie in with that – even if we didn’t know yet what it could do – seemed like a good move.”

Remember that comment about reducing the number of things that could go wrong? “We went,” says Sellars, “from having two switches, a blade chassis with 8 nodes inside of it and a SAN down to four nodes and two network switches.”

Was the change difficult to make? Padilla shrugs. “Azure Stack HCI doesn’t seem any different from Windows Server on our end. We had a couple minor issues during setup but that was it. It’s been rock solid.”

When Padilla looks at the impact of Azure Stack HCI, the theme of *simplicity* comes up repeatedly. “It’s less work today to evaluate our infrastructure,” he says. “I was more hands-on with our previous one. Every once in a while, we’d have a node or two that would get hung up. It was painful.”

And Azure Stack HCI? “It just sits in there and does its own thing,” Padilla laughs. “We leave it alone most of the time.”

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Andrew Padilla

Infrastructure & Operations Manager, Stevens County

The DataON Difference: The Human Touch

Technology aside, Padilla says the thing that really sets DataON apart is the human element. “When I think of DataON, I see faces,” he says. “I see people I can reach out to and talk to. People I can count on. With Cisco, I didn’t see them as people – I saw them as a web page. We had a sales rep but he didn’t necessarily know anything about technology.”

Sellars and Padilla met DataON’s **Howard Lo** at an industry event a few years ago, continued the conversation over dinner and slowly developed a friendship from there. They knew who they wanted to work with.



“It was the right time for them to do this,” Lo says. “They wanted to refresh their infrastructure. Between the relationship and the technology, they felt comfortable with who they were dealing with. DataON is a smaller company so we’re able to take great care of our customers.”

Impact & Future Plans

Stevens County’s move to Microsoft hybrid cloud was partly about the present and partly about preparing for the future. They wanted impact and they got it with their new Microsoft hybrid cloud infrastructure.

“I feel like it’s more stable. We haven’t really had to touch the new infrastructure. We haven’t had to fiddle with it. And that’s the highest praise I could have.”

Andrew Padilla

Infrastructure & Operations Manager, Stevens County


All the pieces are in place now, according to Sellars. “I just like our plan moving forward,” he says. “There were so many different parts with Cisco and they all had different end-of-life dates. It was hard to track. I just like consolidating everything into one solution and saying, ‘We will see you again in 2027 or 2028.’”

Sellars also hails the impact on his department’s role in the County budget process. “This is more of an operating expenditure,” he notes, “which is great because my board likes having budgets that are evened out and don’t have major spikes every few years.”

Padilla says the team is currently making plans to learn more about Azure hybrid cloud capabilities. For now, he appreciates how simple day-to-day management has been. “It’s not all that different from what we had before,” Padilla says. “We’re still running Hyper-V. We still use either Windows Admin Center or Failover Cluster Manager. As far as what we do with it, nothing has changed. But there’s less equipment and the less there is, the better off you are. I feel like it’s more stable. We haven’t really had to touch the new infrastructure. We haven’t had to fiddle with it. And that’s the highest praise I could have.”

 www.dataonstorage.com

 sales@dataonstorage.com

 1.714.441.8820

About DataON

DataON is a hybrid cloud computing company that exclusively leverages Microsoft technologies to build hybrid cloud solutions that help companies and organizations achieve more with less. Our solutions utilize Azure Stack HCI for on-premises compute and storage and are designed so you can implement Azure hybrid cloud services such as Azure Arc, Azure Virtual Desktop, Azure Kubernetes Service, Arc-enabled data services, and more. Our Microsoft expertise and white glove service & support is the DataON difference.

DataON has deployed over 1500 HCI clusters with 1000 enterprise customers. Our enterprise-level solutions, delivered as a complete, turnkey experience, are designed to provide the highest level of performance, manageability, and security offered. DataON is a Microsoft Gold Partner, Microsoft Cloud Service Provider (CSP), and an Intel Platinum Partner.



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