

California School District And its IT Staff Move Towards the Cloud with Microsoft & DataON

Orange Unified School District on board with Microsoft Hybrid Cloud



Customer

Orange County (CA) Unified School District

Solutions & Services

Azure Stack HCI

Azure Arc

Azure Hybrid Services

Industry

K-12 Education

Organization Size

10,000+

Location

Orange, CA, USA

Sometimes we talk so much about IT, we forget about the people who are tasked with taking care of it. And sometimes we realize the best IT solution is the one your staff can really sink its teeth into.

Tam Nguyen, Director of Information Technology for Orange (CA) Unified School District, needed a way to move his workloads and his *people* towards the cloud in a manageable and sustainable way. He knew it was a big jump to make. He saw DataON and Microsoft as the best partners – with Azure Stack HCI as the backbone to get to hybrid – to do that. Now he’s conquering his challenges and positioning his department and his users for the future.

The Customer: Orange Unified School District

Orange Unified School District is a K-12 public school district in Southern California. It was founded in 1953 and today operates 40 schools, 19 of which have been recognized as California Distinguished Schools. With 25,000 students and about 4,000 employees, it is the 35th largest school district out of more than 1,000 in the State of California.

The Challenge: Reach for the Cloud

Tam Nguyen was dissatisfied with his existing SAN infrastructure solution. He knew he needed to move on from it in order to evolve and the thought of managing future growth was causing him a fair amount of anxiety. He wanted his staff to be able to manage on-premises workloads through a cloud interface. “Everything is going to the cloud,” he laughed. “It’s a buzzword but it’s true.” He pointed out that people have been saying this for 10 years, but he’s not aware of any California school district that’s fully made it. “Things are still moving in that direction – just not as fast. School districts will have to be there too.”

Nguyen’s big challenge was to move Orange USD’s operations towards the cloud without alienating his small network infrastructure staff of four people. “They’re jacks of all trades!” he said. “Not so much cloud experts. When I first talked about this, the staff buy-in just wasn’t there for the cloud. People were uncomfortable. I knew the computers would do what we tell them to do but the people might drag their feet. I wanted it to be a sustainable one-way trip.”

The Challenge

- Transition to a hybrid cloud infrastructure to position for future growth
- Manage on-premises workloads through a cloud interface
- Build confidence and get staff buy-in for move to hybrid cloud

The Solution

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

The Result

- Happy, bought-in IT staff
- No more worries about how to get to hybrid cloud
- Peace of mind from DataON support
- Hardware used to fullest potential

The process of getting closer to the cloud turned out to be more complex than he imagined, Nguyen said. But, again, it wasn't about the software or the hardware – it was about the people. Nguyen came to the conclusion that he and his team couldn't do it all on their own. They needed help, outside expertise, not only to get the project rolling but to give them the confidence to push forward.

Solution: Microsoft Hybrid Cloud with Azure Stack HCI

In early 2022, a Microsoft colleague helped set up a meeting with Nguyen and DataON to talk about Microsoft hybrid cloud solutions. DataON articulated how they – and Microsoft Azure Stack HCI – could help a K-12 school district like Orange to thrive. Azure Stack HCI would help them get to hybrid cloud and Azure Arc would help them manage it once they got there.

Nguyen saw the potential of Microsoft hybrid cloud and Azure Stack HCI. He could start with an on-premises hyper-converged infrastructure (HCI), then quickly and seamlessly extend to Azure hybrid cloud services such as Azure Virtual Desktop for Azure Stack HCI (preview), Azure Kubernetes Service (AKS) hybrid, and Azure Arc-enabled data services. He also had plans to leverage other Azure hybrid services like cloud-based backup, update management, security monitoring and disaster recovery.

When Azure Stack HCI is deployed, Nguyen learned, it would automatically appear as an Azure Arc-enabled resource in the Azure Portal. From Arc in the Portal, he would be able to deploy containers, virtual machines and services, as well as manage, secure and govern deployed resources. Support, observability, and updates for Azure Stack HCI would all be provided through Arc.

“[Microsoft hybrid cloud] was a route that would help us move towards the cloud, manage from the cloud, and it would give our team a chance to acclimate. It was the best way to get our people – and eventually our workloads – there in a sustainable manner.”

Tam Nguyen, Director of IT, Orange USD

Pleased with both the technology and the support model, Nguyen decided Orange USD would slowly phase Azure Stack HCI into its existing environment based on workloads. “We said, ‘Let’s try this,’ he recalls. “It was a route that would help us move towards the cloud, manage from the cloud and it would give our team a chance to acclimate. It was the best way to get our people – and eventually our workloads – there in a sustainable manner.”

As it turned out, Azure Stack HCI and Arc were an ideal fit for Nguyen’s hybrid cloud vision, providing a path through which he and his staff could gradually – successfully – migrate towards the cloud.

Orange USD’s hybrid cloud journey is now well underway: they deployed Azure Stack HCI for infrastructure and intend to broaden their use of Azure hybrid services in the future.

Support: The Great Differentiator

Nguyen said he’s happy with his Microsoft hybrid cloud technology. (At one point, he quipped, “I wasn’t looking for it, but it was looking for me.”) But he got even more animated when talking about the support he’s now receiving, pausing to note that it clearly differentiates DataON from rivals like Dell, HP, Cisco, Nutanix and VMware.

“The support is *why we chose* DataON,” he said flatly. “[DataON] provided built-in support and that was huge. Not nickel and dime, not by the hour, not by tier. It was a full solution with your staff behind it. There were no licensing issues and no annoying ‘Let me transfer you’ when we call.”



That reassurance, Nguyen said, gave him and his staff confidence that they were moving in the right direction. “It goes back to the people part. I know DataON can support me in making the transition to Microsoft and they built the trust and confidence in my team to make that leap.”

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Nguyen noted that this sets DataON apart from other companies in this space. “It had been really difficult to get support from other vendors,” he confides. “It’s hard to find experts. But DataON focuses on this [Microsoft hybrid cloud] and this only. You know this stuff inside out.”

Impact & Advice

In the end, Nguyen said, moving to the cloud wasn’t just about technology. It was about getting his team on board and going in a direction that everyone could buy into and feel good about. He ultimately saw DataON as the best available bridge – a safety net – when migrating off of VMware.

Nguyen noted that no school district in California is fully in the cloud and comfortable with it. But he credited DataON and Microsoft with helping him do more than he previously imagined possible in starting that process. “I’m very excited about it,” he says.


Nguyen summed up the impact of the Microsoft hybrid cloud solution in glowing terms:

- Happy IT staff who have fully bought in to their new Microsoft hybrid cloud technology
- Hardware that is being used to its fullest potential
- No more worries about how he will get to hybrid cloud
- Peace of mind that DataON will provide the support he needs in the short and long term

When asked what advice he would offer other organizations just starting their hybrid cloud journey, Nguyen replied with just two words: "Keep going!" Translation: it's worth it.

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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.

