Wholesale Distribution & Services

Serving up a smoother journey to the cloud

SSP Group

Travel food specialist SSP takes a big step to bringing more of its business into the cloud, using a hyperconverged infrastructure built on Lenovo ThinkAgile SX for Microsoft Azure Stack Hub to bring agile cloud capabilities to on-premises IT with speed and ease.

Lenovo

Powered by

Microsoft

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Who is
SSP Group?

Across travel locations around the world, there's a strong chance that SSP will be there.

Headquartered in London, England, the group operates more than 600 sites in 35 countries worldwide. Prior the pandemic, it served upwards of 1.5 million customers every day.

SSP *The Food Travel Experts*

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The
Challenge

SSP has already captured a big slice of the food services market—and it's still hungry for more, aiming to become the leading food and beverage provider in travel locations worldwide.

The group sees the cloud as a key enabler of these growth objectives. With access to the cloud comes greater efficiency and agility, both of which are imperative to supporting an increasingly global business and meeting ever-evolving consumer and market demands.

That strategy has seen SSP embrace a hybrid cloud model in recent years. Alongside its traditional three-tier data center infrastructure, which supports a number of legacy applications, the group has been steadily moving more workloads to Microsoft Azure. Eager to pick up the pace of this transformation, SSP determined that the time was right to evolve to a more modern data center architecture—one that could easily scale with the group's ambitions and provide the foundations for running fully on cloud.

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"Integration with the Microsoft ecosystem was a top priority for us. Azure was our chosen public cloud, and we were already using Microsoft Hyper-V to support over 500 virtual machines in our on-premises environment. We were especially keen to find an infrastructure platform with a well-supported and documented transition path from our existing hypervisors to the new ones."

Francisco Castillo
Head of Infrastructure, SSP

Getting to the cloud faster with HCI

SSP turned to long-time partner Maple Computing, now part of the BDR Group, to help plan its next steps. After reviewing several scenarios for evolving the data center architecture, the team determined that a hyperconverged infrastructure (HCI) offered an ideal stepping stone to a cloud-first future. As SSP was keen to remain within the Microsoft ecosystem, it focused on finding an HCI platform that was certified by Microsoft and offered easy integration with Azure.

That search ultimately led the group to Lenovo ThinkAgile SX for Microsoft Azure Stack Hub: a pre-integrated, rack scale solution specifically designed to enable deployment of hybrid clouds with Microsoft Azure Stack Hub.

Hardware
Lenovo ThinkAgile SX for Azure Stack Hub
Lenovo ThinkSystem SR650

Software
Lenovo XClarity
Microsoft Azure Stack Hub

Services
Lenovo Premier Support

Lenovo ThinkAgile SX for Microsoft Azure Stack Hub makes it possible for SSP to run Azure cloud services from the security of its on-premises data center. As the services are the same as they are in the public cloud, Azure Stack Hub enables consistent cloud services across the end-to-end Azure environment.

Working with Lenovo and Maple Computing, now part of the BDR Group, SSP deployed Azure Stack Hub software on a cluster of 16 Lenovo ThinkSystem SR650 hyperconverged nodes. The cluster is split across two sites: the group's main production environment, housed at a data center in Manchester, and a secondary disaster recovery (DR) site more than 150 miles away in Slough. In the future, SSP plans to establish a fully virtualized DR environment in the Azure cloud for added resilience.

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"HCI was unknown territory for us, and we had some hesitation about making such a big move. Lenovo took our concerns to Microsoft, and they co-funded a proof-of-concept for us. We were able to check out the tech for ourselves and see what it would be like to configure, manage, and even restore workloads. That really added to our confidence and confirmed that hyperconvergence was the way forward."

Ben Bevan
IT Compute and Storage Manager, SSP

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Lenovo gave us firm commitments for shipping times and pulled out all the stops to make sure our equipment arrived on schedule, during a time when the whole industry was experiencing serious supply chain issues. This has been a big change for us, and it hasn't been without its challenges, but we couldn't have asked for better partners to guide us through it than Lenovo and Maple Computing, now part of the BDR Group. We've worked so well together, and we look forward to building on that partnership as our journey to cloud continues."

Francisco Castillo
Head of Infrastructure, SSP

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Results

Making the move from a three-tier architecture to HCI has helped SSP streamline both physical and virtual environments. In the data center, it's downsized from 3.5 server racks to less than one. Meanwhile, SSP has consolidated some 30 hypervisors to just eight with Azure Stack Hub. The new architecture is also impressively energy efficient, reducing electricity consumption by approximately 130,000 KWh year-on-year.

Lenovo has packed a great deal of compute power and faster storage into a much more compact footprint. Maximum disk throughput has risen from 8 Gb/s to 20 Gb/s, which has translated into improved application performance. The ThinkSystem SR650 servers have brought a similarly big boost to system and memory performance, accelerating a number of key workloads.

Ben Bevan, IT Compute and Storage Manager at SSP, gives an example: "We have one set of sales reports that used to take around two hours to run. Now, with Lenovo, it takes just 40 minutes. It means that we can get accurate sales figures for the previous day on the CEO's desk before lunch, rather than in the late afternoon like before."

Most importantly, SSP has now paved the way for running its business fully in the cloud. With the Lenovo-Microsoft HCI bringing cloud computing to the group's on-premises environment, SSP can deploy and run workloads consistently, wherever they reside— gaining the efficiency and agility it needs to keep growing a thriving digital business.

- Rationalized hypervisor landscape by 73%
- 3.5 server racks reduced to less than one
- Hours to minutes performance improvement for certain business processes
- ~130,000 KWh of electricity saved annually by consolidating on HCI

> "With Lenovo ThinkAgile SX for Microsoft Azure Stack Hub, we can deliver services to business more quickly, easily, and consistently—at scale and at a lower cost."

Francisco Castillo
Head of Infrastructure, SSP

Why **Lenovo**?

The choice of hardware platform came down to two options: Lenovo and SSP's incumbent hardware provider. Lenovo came to the table with a strong technical solution, offering better-quality, higher-performing hardware that was also more cost-effective. But what sealed the deal was Lenovo's commitment to understanding SSP's requirements and willingness to go the extra mile to deliver on them.

"With our incumbent provider, we got the feeling that they just wanted to sell us some hardware," notes Bevan. "We got a completely different feeling with Lenovo. They were very engaged right from our first meetings. The account team worked to get to know our business and our goals for IT; we had calls with HCI experts and senior salespeople who gave very thoughtful and confident answers to all our questions."

**Partner perspective: Maple Computing,
now part of the BDR Group**

"Hyperconvergence was still a relatively new
approach at the time, but SSP was willing to
take a calculated risk to ensure big rewards:
greater consolidation, performance, and control
of their hybrid environment. Most importantly,
HCI has been a pivotal stepping stone enabling
SSP to place more of the business into the cloud
in a controlled way."

Liam O'Callaghan
Business Development Manager, Maple Computing, now part of
the BDR Group

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