



Best Western GB takes back control with Microsoft Azure and Northdoor

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Colin Robinson, Head of ICT, Best Western GB

About Best Western GB

Best Western GB is the UK's largest group of independently owned and managed hotels. Established in 1967, the group has 250 member hotels, and is part of Best Western International, which represents 4,000 hotels globally. The group strives to achieve high quality and value while promoting the individuality and personality of its hotels.

Finding the right partner

Best Western GB's member hotels must maintain a reliable and responsive presence on the web – particularly as digital channels are the predominant source of bookings. The hotels' websites are built on a common template and back-end services, and were previously hosted by Best Western GB in a third-party data centre. As the company approached the end of its existing contract with its managed services provider, it wanted a platform that would help it increase flexibility and reduce costs.

-  *Achieved non-disruptive migration of more than 100 websites to the Azure cloud*
-  *Gained greater flexibility and speed while significantly reducing costs*
-  *Gained expert ongoing support, enabling rapid evolution of web services to meet changing needs*

Colin Robinson, Head of ICT at Best Western GB, explains: “The existing contract was quite rigid and we had limited scope for making changes. All requests had to be managed through a slow procurement process, and the result was that we could not respond rapidly to changes in the market or requests from our members for new functionality.”

Recognising that a public-cloud solution would provide the agility it sought at relatively low costs, Best Western GB determined that its past investments in Microsoft technologies and internal Microsoft technical skills made the Microsoft Azure public-cloud platform the best option.

With no in-house experience of migrating to the cloud, and facing a tight deadline to set up the new environment before the expiry of its existing contract, Best Western GB selected Northdoor to execute the project. “We saw that Northdoor years of experience and had recently executed a similar Azure migration, which gave us the confidence we required,” comments Colin Robinson. “The fact that Northdoor also holds four Microsoft Gold Partner competencies, including ones for Azure and SQL Data Platform, sealed the deal.”

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Colin Robinson, Head of ICT, Best Western GB

Expert migration

The first step for Northdoor was to analyse the existing hosted infrastructure and plan the migration. This stage revealed the necessity to upgrade both Microsoft Windows and SQL Server software to the latest versions. Northdoor also identified the potential to consolidate some areas of the infrastructure, helping Best Western GB to consolidate the required footprint and corresponding monthly costs on Azure.

For disaster recovery, Northdoor built the new infrastructure on Azure across the UK South and UK West data centres, introducing two SQL Server clusters to help ensure that the critical databases underpinning Best Western GB's public-facing websites are always available for business. Northdoor also took advantage of Azure Availability Sets to improve availability further by distributing virtual resources across multiple isolated hardware nodes. This means that in the unlikely event of a hardware or software failure within Azure, only a subset of virtual machines will be impacted, helping to keep web services running at all times.

In addition, Northdoor created a backup vault for the Azure virtual machines, configured with geo-redundant storage services. Best Western can rapidly recover these backup images to a different Azure data centre in the event of a disaster. In normal operations, it can use this element of the solution to fire up replica virtual servers for test and development purposes.

“As well as ensuring the smooth migration of more than 100 websites to the Azure cloud, Northdoor helped by refining and polishing our architecture, and updating our software to the latest versions,” says Colin Robinson. “Northdoor now runs the environment, acting as our Cloud Services Provider.”

Solution components

- Microsoft Azure Cloud Platform

Stable, flexible, cost-efficient

Following the non-disruptive migration to Azure, Best Western GB now has a stable, flexible, cost-efficient platform. Northdoor's experience and project management skills helped reduce risk and meet the tight deadline for migration.

Colin Robinson says, “We can now change elements of our service much more rapidly thanks to the diligent support from Northdoor, as our CSP service agreement includes support.”

On the financial front, running on Azure has significantly reduced costs for Best Western GB, enabling the company to free up cash for investment in other projects.