Taming the supply chain 24/7 with Softchoice in the Azure cloud

The retail market is brutally competitive. Faced with large numbers of SKUs to wrangle, razor-thin margins, and high customer expectations for convenience and choice, top retailers need to have nano-second control over their inventory and purchasing practices to stay competitive and maximize their profits. And as we witnessed during the pandemic crisis, managing a volatile supply chain can often be like herding cats. Globally dispersed cats.

Cloud-enabled, machine-learning-driven analytics can work magic in this situation, and one leading technology company was regularly performing supply chain and inventory magic for top retailers. When it came to delivering value and profitability to retailers, this company was crushing it with its cutting-edge, Microsoft Azure-based machine learning (ML) technology and human expertise. They were turning the chaos and complexity endemic to retail into ultra-lean inventory practices and profit-driving efficiency. In short, they knew just how to get all those cats in a row.

There was just one problem: The company's small IT team was struggling to support their growing customer base, who needed instant resolutions to their problems at all hours of the day and night.

The magic formula: Agility, security, and unflappable support
Using powerful Azure technology in combination with their own, this supply chain and inventory management company's ultimate aim was providing retailers with big data insights and optimal operational efficiency so they could maintain lean warehouses while staying focused on growing their businesses. The tech was definitely doing its job, but the need to provide 24x7x365 user support was a huge stumbling block. Also, despite being heavy Azure Data Platform users, the company's IT team had some Azure knowledge gaps—gaps that needed to be filled in if they were going to take advantage of Azure's full feature spectrum without having to recruit more staff.

It made sense to find a trusted third party to fill their needs, one that could provide advanced Azure expertise plus the ability to provide around-the-clock, rapid-response support services for their operations. And here's the catch: The managed service provider (MSP) the company chose would have to adhere to some serious security and compliance standards. You've seen in the news what retailers go through. With all that customer data in their systems, retailers are rich targets for the malware and ransomware schemes of malicious actors. This company's supporting partner would have to have ultra-secure methods of accessing their environment and participating in their operations.

Ultimately, the company chose to partner with Softchoice. Softchoice is an accredited Microsoft Azure Expert MSP, which is the highest accreditation available for the Azure cloud platform. As Microsoft Canada's 2020 Partner of the Year with 13 Microsoft gold competencies, they were no stranger to high levels of security and knew just how to deliver it while maximizing the company's Azure use.

Softchoice offered to architect and continuously support a better, more cost-efficient cloud environment that was compliant, secure, and made the best use of Azure's powerful suite of services.

"The knowledge that Softchoice is using best-in-class technology to ensure their work with us is secure, audited, and reportable gives me and my team the confidence to invest in our relationship with Softchoice to drive our cloud outcomes with Azure."

-- **Director of IT and Application Operations**

Peace of mind, just in time

Businesses up and down any supply chain have to be able to move and adapt quickly, and everyone in retail understands the importance of building supply chain resiliency. Every supply chain business is also familiar with the Agile development concepts of "just enough" and "just in time." Softchoice's solution for their client therefore had to be able to uphold these methods of working within their Azure environments. Luckily, Softchoice understands the need for speed and can deliver it without sacrificing security—especially with the world-leading security of Azure at its back.

With Azure Lighthouse as a foundation, Softchoice's access management solution was a perfect baseline from which to develop a securely accessible system using multifactor authentication (MFA) and employing a custom automation of workflows and just-in-time enablement to drive optimal value for the client and its customers. They also maximized the client's use of other powerful products in the Azure suite for a greater ROI.

With the right input from Softchoice, this company managed to mitigate all the risks it faced. The custom Softchoice access management solution the client now uses provides all the security it sorely needed without losing any operational speed. Not only can Softchoice now provide the client's customers with 24x7x365 support, but they can also easily provide the client with reports and an audit trail for every action

a Softchoice support team member takes when interacting with the system. This was a must-have for the client since its retail customers are so vulnerable to cyberattack. The company's IT team can now enjoy the system's new efficiencies with complete peace of mind.

"Our customer has been able to launch new solutions using Azure AI and machine learning systems to drive increases in their clients' profits of over 10%. Azure Lighthouse is an enabling technology for Softchoice, allowing us to securely and confidently support their growing use of Azure. Over the past year, their use of these capabilities, combined with Softchoice support, has led to them growing their use of Azure by over 300%."

-- Patrick O'Leary, Director of Cloud Innovation at Softchoice

Harnessing Azure Expert MSP capabilities drives a more resilient supply chain
Since Softchoice's customer successfully offloaded their heftier operations and support needs, their IT team has been able to focus their efforts on innovating to drive business results rather than constantly putting out fires. Having access to Softchoice's around-the-clock support and Azure expertise—with full accountability for every support action they take within their system—frees the IT team up to inject their own industry-specific "oomph" into their offering.

So what's the bottom line? Clearly, Softchoice's customer has made their solution more competitive within their target market. The proof in the pudding is that in the two years since they began collaborating with Softchoice, they have doubled their customer base.

In that same time, Softchoice's customer has increased its Azure consumption by 300%, and they aren't looking back.

Azure and Softchoice power solutions that are secure, resilient, and future-forward
Little do consumers realize all that has gone on behind the scenes to get them exactly what they want, exactly when they want it while allowing the retailers they frequent to remain profitable. All over the globe, Azure Expert MSPs like Softchoice are making the world work better by leveraging cutting-edge, Azure-native technologies in combination with their own ingenious solutions.

Find out more on the [technology partner page on Softchoice.com](#) and on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).