



The case for cloud

Why Waukesha County Technical College made the move



With 25,000 students enrolled in 150 areas of study, Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC) is one of Wisconsin's top institutions for professional and workforce development.

College leaders know that preparing students to compete in today's job market—as well as remaining competitive as an institution—means having technology that is modern, mobile, and secure.

To meet this need, the college is pursuing a cloud-first technology strategy, which includes migrating its ERP to the cloud.

Why cloud?

In developing a business case for moving to the cloud, Waukesha identified three key benefits:

1. Cost-efficiency

For most institutions, keeping pace with complex, rapidly-evolving technology is a challenge. As the level of expertise required increases, so do labor costs. And taking advantage of innovation requires continuous hardware and software upgrades.

For WCTC, outsourcing its core technology infrastructure to the cloud ultimately became the most cost-efficient option.

Says chief information officer Rodney Nobles: "With the plethora of applications integrating together creating

Projected 3-year savings



\$1.5 million



complex ecosystems—and when you look at the cost and resources it takes to upgrade and maintain them all—it no longer makes sense for us to do it ourselves.”

By hosting its ERP in the cloud, the college projects \$1.5 million in savings over the next three years. Savings will come from:

- shifting day to day management of its data center and mission-critical systems to a third party that can provide increased efficiency;
- avoiding the addition of new personnel to keep up with increased IT demands; and
- reducing on-premises hardware costs.

2. Security and business continuity

While *cost efficiency* was important, cost avoidance also factored into WCTC’s move to the cloud. Specifically, they wanted to avoid the significant cost and disruption that accompanies a major security breach or system outage.

Ellucian works with Amazon Web Services (AWS) to provide a state-of-the-art cloud hosting environment with security and disaster recovery capabilities that far exceed what institutions could deliver on their own.

Says Nobles: “Some people worry about security with cloud, but I assure them it’s actually better. I don’t have security experts like Ellucian does. They can give us what we need to continue to operate at an optimal level.”

3. IT empowerment

With a significant portion of its technology infrastructure now hosted, the college’s IT team can become a strategic business partner within the college.

“Instead of worrying whether our critical systems are up and running efficiently, we can become more purposeful in our work,” says Nobles. “With limited IT human capital, I need to focus my staff on strategic initiatives that benefit the college—especially on the education side of the house.”

Before moving to the cloud, the team focused heavily on managing the data center—servers, backups, and system issues. Going forward, the team can begin to prioritize

more strategic work—supporting each business unit in optimizing technology and processes to meet their goals.

Nobles says IT empowerment was one of the main reasons WCTC chose Ellucian over another cloud provider. “We could have taken our systems and gone somewhere else like Google or Microsoft. But we’d still have been doing most of the work, the upgrades, etc. This was about moving all of the processes along with the ERP, so we could move to a business value-driven organization.”

Advice for other institutions

With so many institutions considering cloud services, Waukesha is frequently called upon for advice. Key points they offer include:

- **Start small.** Before migrating its main systems, data center, and portal to the cloud, the college tested the waters by implementing individual SaaS (software-as-a-service) applications. Evaluating service and managing expectations at a smaller scale prepared them to do so at the ERP level.
- **Communicate:** As with any new technology, educating users was key. “Some people were apprehensive,” says Nobles. “We had to assure them things would work the same way as before and that some things would be even better, like security.”
- **Sweat the details:** Once WCTC decided to make the move, they invested significant time refining the contract to meet their needs. Says Nobles: “We worked hard to spell out roles and responsibilities, protect ourselves, state what type of breaches could happen, how they would be handled, how much insurance we would have, the costs, etc. There was a lot of back and forth to get the language right.”

Ultimately, Nobles advises each institution to look at their own strategic, financial, and operational goals and create a cloud roadmap that will get them where they want to go.

For those with similar needs to WCTC, he says: “If you want enhanced security for critical infrastructure and systems, in-depth disaster recovery, to not have to worry about everything, and to sleep well at night—I think cloud application hosting would be the option for you.”

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