

# How DirectAsia digitally transformed and optimised IT costs with Insight



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Among the many lessons driven home by the pandemic, has been the value – in fact necessity – of agility. It is no longer a ‘nice to have’, it’s now a business imperative in a world where changes are coming faster than ever before – and more abruptly too as new restrictions and plans are introduced to grapple with Covid.

Edgar Lun Pum, DirectAsia Infrastructure and Solution Manager says the Singapore-based insurance services company’s IT infrastructure was an old, on-premise design back in 2019.

The company, an offshoot of London Stock Exchange specialist insurance group Hiscox, launched in Singapore in 2010 with a goal of changing the face of insurance in Asia by offering customers quick, convenient, jargon-free online travel, car and home insurance and providing direct access to enable them to manage their policies.

### Situation

Back in 2019, DirectAsia’s IT infrastructure was, in Edgar’s words, ‘too traditional’.

*“We had about 185 servers – which is a lot for a small setup.”* Most of the servers were virtual machines, with around 40 physical servers.

Some of the legacy on-premises Windows servers, including Microsoft Exchange 201x servers, were nearing end of life, and there was a complex array of legacy licensing.

*“Over the last three years we have been revamping the company to make it more agile and more approachable to customers and we need technology to help us with that,” Edgar says.*

He wanted technology which would be more agile, easier and faster to redeploy, enabling DirectAsia itself, to be all those things. For DirectAsia, as for many companies, that means a hybrid platform combining both cloud services with some on-premise servers.

*“We needed to make ourselves more agile, a more effective team. Being an on-premise datacenter was consuming too much time for the team to support and maintain the hardware, because you had to do patching, upgrade devices... It was taking too much time,” he says.*

**Edgar Lun Pum**  
DirectAsia Infrastructure  
and Solution Manager

The company’s IT team – comprising 20 developers and 13 on the infrastructure side – is also embracing Continuous Integration, Continuous Deployment (CICD), and needed technology that would support that.

*“To move to cloud, to hybrid, obviously was the next step, but we lacked the most important thing which is resource – the knowledge, the know-how, the skills.”*

In order to get his team upskilled in cloud, Edgar wanted to engage with a knowledgeable partner who could help DirectAsia not just by selling them the right technology, but also providing advice and guidance.

### Solution

Edgar called on Insight’s services, in what was the start of an ongoing partnership and a critical part of the company’s digital transformation to cloud.

With Insight’s help, DirectAsia deployed resources into Microsoft Azure, using Active Directory on cloud to help eliminate costly server purchases.

Insight helped DirectAsia get Microsoft credits, enabling the company to deploy resources in Azure for the first couple of months to test the water, before diving in fully.

A move to Office 365 including Teams and SharePoint for collaboration and Word, PowerPoint, Excel and OneNote for productivity, quickly followed. The old Microsoft Exchange Servers were decommissioned, and mailboxes moved to Office 365 Outlook.

It wasn’t just the technology though, with license consultation a critical part of the project.

*“They helped us with the licenses, guiding us and instructing us on what was the best approach,”* Edgar says. *“Their support was vital to help make decisions because some of the licensing models with Azure and Office 365 were very confusing.”*



*"In Azure there was CSP (Cloud Service Provider) or EA (Enterprise Agreement), or pay as you go, and with Office 365 there was Enterprise or Business.*

*"Insight clarified it for us, explained the options and different models and advised us on the best fit".*

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All up, 300 Business Standard Licenses were deployed, along with 30 E3 licenses.

Debby Toh, Insight Partner Manager, says *"Because we are well versed in terms of the Microsoft licensing and also have an internal services team, we can effectively assist customers to manage their cost optimisation around their IT."*

Adds Tiffany Cheah, Insight Account Manager: *"We can provide the license consultation to ensure clients are purchasing the licenses most appropriate to their environment, rather than just upselling the most expensive license. This is an area where Insight's knowledge works really well."*

## Results

Edgar says the move to cloud and Office 365 has been 'brilliant' for DirectAsia's staff.

With Covid forcing staff to work from home, technology like Office 365 and Dynamics 365, which has since been deployed along with other SaaS products, have enabled DirectAsia's teams to remain efficient and effective no matter where they're working.

*"Nowadays, this approach is very welcome for most of the staff and department managers, and they prefer to have the hybrid environment where some come into the office, some work at home – wherever they feel they are more effective."*

But perhaps above all else, the company now has the agility it was seeking. Edgar says it is launching new pure-cloud offerings, including customer portals currently in quality assurance and user acceptance testing, which will enable the company to remove another five or six physical servers from its datacenter.

*"If we are deploying a new website, for example, with the new services we can do it in a matter of hours, rather than weeks, because it's in cloud."*

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DirectAsia Infrastructure  
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Edgar is open that DirectAsia, like any company, wants to be efficient with its money and carefully analyses and compares options before making any technology decisions, comparing several vendors and options before selecting the best.



The move to cloud has reduced the maintenance fees as well as removing the cost of hardware upgrades.

DirectAsia is now embarking on further projects as it continues its digital transformation. First up is enabling Enterprise Voice in Microsoft Teams which will be deployed across Singapore and Thailand.

*"There are a lot of things going on this year and Insight will be a big partner for us,"* Edgar says.

He notes Insight is 'more of a business partner than a sales partner'.

*"They have the knowledge and the services offering to back up the products, and we really appreciate their collaboration because it helps us balance the process of learning the technology, while getting advice from them as well."*

*"They've been vital in helping us with decision making and guiding us, and they've been very proactive in arranging product presentations from vendors or partners and following up everything,"* Edgar says.

*"Insight have helped move us from a very traditional IT infrastructure to a more modern hybrid environment during these difficult times. The Microsoft technologies have also helped us to work and operate better and for the company to be more productive now and in the future."*

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