

Microsoft Azure Customer Solution Case Study



South African cities getting better and faster IT, thanks to Microsoft's cloud

Customer: Sebata (subsidiary of MICROMega)

Website: www.sebata.co.za

Country: Republic of South Africa

Industry: Software

Partner: XContent

Partner Website: www.xcontent.com

Customer Profile

Johannesburg-based Sebata provides integrated technology solutions, enterprise management solutions and multi-disciplinary professional services to the South African public sector IT market.

Software and Services

- Microsoft Azure
- Microsoft .NET

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“Azure means the whole sector can start to box business solutions much, much smarter.”

Gerrit Deyzel, ICT Manager, Sebata

Sebata, a subsidiary of MICROMega, a diversified publicly traded South African services group, has been focused on helping clients in the Republic's public (local government) sector for over four decades. Lately that assistance has been complicated by a growing client resources gap around budgets, assets and on-site tech expertise, slowing service to citizens. To solve this, Sebata, with the help of its implementation partner, XContent, has embraced the cloud — at one stroke simplifying multiple client deployment, support and cybersecurity issues.

A resources gap that was starting to hurt users

Public sector IT leaders at the local government (municipalities) level in South Africa were facing challenges. Hardware, software and network equipment upgrades were taking longer and longer as municipalities slowed their

IT renewal cycles to preserve budget, while internal expertise in the latest IT industry trends was falling behind. As a result, it was becoming increasingly difficult to keep current with the most efficient and cost-effective technology options.

This hadn't been a critical problem until recently. "We offer a range of IT that every municipality needs, from ERP (enterprise resource planning) and other finance systems all the way through to water management applications, as well as professional services," says Sebata's IT manager, Gerrit Deyzel. Meanwhile, the rise in the threat of cybercrime has added an additional layer of complexity to the numerous challenges already faced by municipalities in deploying and maintaining functional administrative and financial systems, he warns.

In response, Sebata, which has been providing services to municipalities for over 40 years, started to investigate more efficient ways to bridge the resources gap its customers were facing. It also wanted to provide a seamless provisioning and support framework. To meet all these challenges, Deyzel engaged with local Microsoft Partner XContent to look at using the Microsoft Azure Cloud Platform.

"Sebata asked if there was a way to deploy the kind of ERP and financial systems its customers depended on in a more agile, scalable way — one that would speed up the time to market for a solution, and so get their customers up and running with new IT in a way that minimized the drain on internal resources", explains XContent's Managing Director, Danie de Lange.

"We proposed Azure as the best way to deliver the services their customers demand, in the most convenient way for all parties." XContent started the migration of Sebata's applications to the cloud a year ago, beginning with extensive work around SQL Server.

The result is what XContent sees as a significant gain for the use and adoption of the cloud in the public sector and

municipalities in South Africa. For example, as a result of embracing the cloud, Sebata managed to very quickly on-board one of the biggest and most locally influential South African city administrations, speeding up the moment when the customer could start benefitting from its technology.

Letting the customer focus on what's important for them

Just why would public sector customers want something like a cloud-based method of delivering functionality? "The biggest single problem our customers face is the way they're held back by old technology and legacy hardware infrastructure," Deyzel explains. "A municipality would be eager to get one of our administrative backend or financial systems up and running, but too often simply did not have the infrastructure on which to deploy it. But now, our customers can implement solutions within days, where before this might have taken them 6 to 12 months."

That's solely due to the move to the cloud, he says. "Now the customer can do what they need to — concentrate on their core business — and they can let us do all the worrying about the infrastructure, upgrades, support and, especially for this market, the online security aspects of the service.

"Our users are very excited about this already, talking about how much better their IT is going to be, with such improved robustness and superior uptime compared to what they had been accepting prior to Azure," he says.

Deyzel says that while there were many possible providers to work with in the cloud once he'd decided to make the

move, the fact that Sebata was already using Microsoft extensively, combined with many attractive features of the Microsoft public cloud offer, such as its cost-effectiveness and options for better connectivity, made the XContent-brokered move ultimately an easy decision.

A major move for the South African local government sector

Sebata confirms that there were some initial cloud concerns, but that these were soon proven unwarranted. "Even three years ago, there were still questions around the use of the cloud," Deyzel says. "But with improvements in hosting capability, connectivity, affordability and protection, the cloud has proven to be a great option for our customers."

This is especially true around options like online Disaster Recovery, which is now a much more realistic option for the customers than setting up a mirror site, for example. "For all these reasons," he says, "the cloud's a really good match for our market."

Plus, Deyzel says Microsoft's way of delivering secure remote IT provision is offering him better availability, continuity for his IT environment, and flexibility and cost savings for both Sebata and his clients. "There's been no wheels reinvented here; it's all there for you, in one suite."

Next steps include looking at Office365 and SharePoint for Azure, while in the longer term, Deyzel is sure his company's decision to embrace the cloud paves the way for widespread acceptance and adoption of the approach across the entire South African public sector.

"This is a great way of delivering the truly end-to-end solutions our customers need for maximum efficiency and the very best digital public services to citizens," he concludes.

"Azure means the whole municipality sector can start to box much, much smarter."