Homebuilder accommodates huge acquisition, outsources IT work by moving to the cloud

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> Bob D'Unger, Vice President of Information Technology, TRI Pointe Group

Customer: TRI Pointe Group
Website: www.tripointegroup.com
Customer size: 1,000 employees
Country or region: United States
Industry: Manufacturing—Construction
Partner: Pravis
Website: www.pravis.com

Customer profile
TRI Pointe Group is one of the largest public homebuilders in the United States. It builds and sells homes and condominiums through a portfolio of six brands in different areas of the country.

Software and services
- Microsoft Azure
  - Microsoft Azure SQL Database
  - Microsoft Azure Storage
  - Microsoft Azure Virtual Machines
  - Microsoft Azure Virtual Network
- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
  - Windows Server 2012 R2
  - Microsoft SQL Server 2014
  - Microsoft System Center 2012 R2

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In 2013, TRI Pointe Group made a large acquisition that increased its size fivefold and its IT infrastructure 50 fold. With a legal deadline looming for acquisition completion, TRI Pointe turned to IT partner Pravis, which created a massive IT infrastructure in Microsoft Azure. TRI Pointe met its deadline and gained boundless scalability to accommodate future acquisitions. With Microsoft handling servers, TRI Pointe can focus on building homes.

From 2009 to 2013, TRI Pointe Group grew steadily as a successful regional US homebuilder operating in California and Colorado. In mid-2013, TRI Pointe became the mouse that swallowed an elephant. It acquired Weyerhaeuser Real Estate Company (WRECO), the homebuilding subsidiary of Weyerhaeuser, a company five times its size. Overnight, TRI Pointe gained five new homebuilding businesses across the United States.

In fact, with the WRECO acquisition, TRI Pointe Group became one of the top ten largest homebuilders by equity market capitalization in the US. It went from building 400 homes a year to building 3,200 homes a year.

Six months to accommodate more than 100 servers
Before the acquisition, TRI Pointe had only a few servers. But WRECO had an IT infrastructure of more than 100 servers, including a large Oracle JD Edwards system and Oracle Hyperion business intelligence (BI) environment, which suddenly needed a new home.

"Weyerhaeuser had hosted and managed the WRECO servers, and now we had six months to transfer those servers to TRI Pointe, of course without sacrificing any application functionality and uptime," says Bob D'Unger, Vice President of Information Technology at TRI Pointe Group. "We didn't have time nor did we

PRAVIS

want to build a datacenter. Our focus is building homes."

Besides, D'Unger knew that no on-premises environment could scale as quickly as TRI Pointe needed to accommodate the massive increase in its IT infrastructure. The acquisition terms came with a strict deadline: six months to completion.

Instant relief in the cloud
D'Unger turned to longtime TRI Pointe IT partner, Pravis, which recommended that TRI Pointe look to one of the many infrastructure-as-a-service (IaaS) offerings available from public cloud providers. D'Unger agreed. Guided by Pravis, TRI Pointe looked at both Microsoft Azure—an environment for creating and running applications in Microsoft datacenters—and Amazon Web Services.

TRI Pointe chose Azure, for several reasons: TRI Pointe primarily used Microsoft solutions already, Azure had proven support for enterprise-caliber Oracle applications, it was priced more aggressively than Amazon Web Services, and TRI Pointe liked the Azure road map. "Throughout our long partnership with TRI Pointe, we've learned that solution flexibility is key," says Nathan Bressette, Lead Engineer at Pravis. "Every solution we select must be able to accommodate massive growth at a moment's notice, and Azure is simply unrivaled in its ability to do just that."

Within days, Pravis set up a massive IaaS environment in Azure for TRI Pointe—more than 100 Azure Virtual Machines—and used Azure Network in conjunction with a multisite virtual private network to connect the various TRI Pointe offices to Azure. TRI Pointe also uses Azure SQL Database to run its Citrix XenApp database.

While TRI Pointe currently runs the JD Edwards production servers on-premises, it set up a cost-effective disaster recovery site for the application in Azure.

TRI Pointe also runs an Oracle Hyperion BI environment in Azure. Hyperion pulls data from the on-premises JD Edwards system and creates BI dashboards for analyzing sales leads, construction costs, schedules, and more. Again, moving Oracle environments to the cloud gives TRI Pointe a way to reduce costs without sacrificing performance.

Other key workloads in Azure include:

- A document management solution used to issue and manage invoices, contracts, and other documents.
- The large Citrix XenApp environment mentioned earlier, which the company uses to deliver applications to remote employees across the country.
- The company's backup infrastructure with 20 TB of data, which replicates to Microsoft Azure Storage.
- All file shares, which are replicated through Distributed File System Replication to Azure.
- Dozens of websites.
- Many special-purpose applications with databases and web interfaces for functions such as project management, construction management, and home-building options.

Pravis uses Microsoft System Center 2012 R2 to manage both the TRI Pointe Azure environment and the remaining on-premises applications.

Acquisition completed on time, boundless scalability for future growth
By using Azure, TRI Pointe was able to complete the WRECO acquisition on time and meet the legal deadline. "There could be no delay in the acquisition, because we had a legal hard stop," D'Unger says. "And we definitely don't want to be in the business of owning a datacenter—we sell homes."

With its move to the cloud, TRI Pointe has plenty of scalability to accommodate future acquisitions. "This probably won't

be the last acquisition, because TRI Pointe Group is an extremely fast-growing company," D'Unger says. "With Azure, we aren't handcuffed to a datacenter that's stuck at a certain size. We have the ability to accommodate any size workload at a moment's notice."

Conversely, TRI Pointe can instantly adjust IT resources. "The building industry is prone to boom and bust cycles, and it's very difficult to trim capital assets that are no longer needed," D'Unger says. "Azure gives us the flexibility to scale in either direction."

Focus on homes, not datacenters
The use of Azure also frees TRI Pointe to do what it does best: build homes, not datacenters. "As an IT department, our sole purpose is to provide solutions that help the business sell more homes and make better margins," D'Unger says. "By letting Microsoft provide infrastructure, we can focus on solutions. For example, we needed to replace a records retention solution that WRECO had used; I selected one and a day later had the server ready for the data migration process."

As another example, TRI Pointe avoided the need to research and build a disaster recovery datacenter. Instead, it just performs daily file-level backups to Azure Storage and georeplicates storage across Azure sites for applications that require high availability.

"When you own hardware, the onus is on you to find ways to constantly expand and improve your infrastructure, which brings research and testing costs," D'Unger says. "With Azure, Microsoft assumes those responsibilities and costs. It's continually improving Azure and bringing out new offerings that will solve problems we never even anticipated."