Toronto based blueballoon Health Services Implements Front-to-Back Microsoft Windows Azure Active Directory Cloud Solution for Easy, Secure, Information Workflows and Enhanced Mobility

by Robert D. Brilliant

Windows Azure Active Directory and Office 365 assist clinicians for better pediatric healthcare.

Customer: blueballoon
Website: www.blue-balloon.com
Country or Region: Canada
Industry: Health Services

Customer Profile

blueballoon specializes in pediatric assessment and treatment for children and young adults (ages 0-18+) with mild to severe physical and developmental challenges, delays and learning disabilities. They operate four facilities across Ontario in Toronto, Burlington, Aurora and Waterloo.

Software and Services
- Windows Azure Active Directory
- Office 365

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Situation

"Blueballoon" may sound like a whimsical business name, but for Toronto based blueballoon Health Services, their mission of making pediatric developmental healthcare accessible to families is anything but light-hearted. Founded in 2004, Blueballoon serves children with a wide range of learning and behavioral challenges, including speech impediments, autism spectrum disorders, and social-emotional development needs.

When it comes to developing and implementing effective treatment plans, every piece of information pertaining to a therapy program is important. And as data are complied and analyzed, so too arises the need to manage that information efficiently, keep it up-to-date, and make it readily available to everyone with a legitimate need to know, regardless of their location.

For several years, blueballoon met its information infrastructure needs through an assortment of on-premises and Cloud-based software tools from multiple vendors. While this arrangement worked to some extent, it also created some problems, including multiple, time-consuming log-on procedures for each application, a lack of support for tablets, smartphones, and other mobile devices, overall complexity of use, and the lack of effective group productivity tools. Even more important, blueballoon required a path for seamlessly integrating Pavasoft, an essential clinical practice software, and NetSuite, into their overall IT infrastructure.

Solution

To solve these challenges, blueballoon asked CaptiveLogix, a Toronto-based systems integrator, to develop a turnkey total cloud-based solution that could effectively address, and solve, their entire set of requirements. blueballoon presented CaptiveLogix with a list of new system requirements that included: ease of use, data security, a powerful integrated toolset optimized for mobile use, accurate billing and scheduling, and deep inclusion of Pavasoft.

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CaptiveLogix recommended a complete Microsoft-based Cloud solution that fused the "front-end" user experience with the "back-end" technical architecture. The front end is Office 365, a subscription-based service that offers access to various services and software built around the Microsoft office platform. Office 365 provides virtually anywhere access to familiar Microsoft Office tools, plus enterprise-grade email, conferencing, and other IT services.

The back-end is Windows Azure, with a focus on Windows Azure Active Directory, the cloud-based Azure service that provides identity management and access control capabilities for Cloud applications. Windows Azure is an open and flexible cloud platform that enables users to quickly build, deploy, and manage applications across a global network of Microsoft-managed data centers. Applications can be built using any language, tool, or framework, enabling users to build and run highly scalable applications without focusing on the infrastructure.

Windows Azure Active Directory (AD) augments the core Windows Azure service by enabling secure identity management and access control capabilities for Cloud applications. Windows Azure AD provides REST-based enterprise-class identity management that can be leveraged across any cloud-based system deployment. For CaptiveLogix, Windows Azure AD was the ideal choice for a client like blueballoon that needed flexible, but secure, access control to sensitive client therapy data.

Windows Azure AD provides robust security and simplified user-name/password structure. As more and more enterprises move to the cloud, they can no longer rely on their internal identity systems and users often confront the "YAUP" dilemma: "Yet Another User name and Password" to remember. Windows Azure AD effectively solves the YAUP problem by providing the user with a single sign on (SSO) that applies to every application running over the cloud network.

"Blueballoon presented us with the challenge of accessing not only information they held in their back-end systems, but applying a whole lot more clinical information to each client case," says Andrew Collard, director of CaptiveLogix software development and company co-founder. "So things like uploading files related to clients, managing the treatment plans for each client, and reliable and up-to-date tracking of services provided

are among the information categories that they want to make readily available to their clinicians. So basically, what this Windows Azure AD cloud portal that we built does for them is create a much more user friendly and directed way for blueballoon staff to interface with that clinical information. Azure Active Directory is integral to any deployment where you're dealing with different user roles, different geographic locations, and potentially different languages. We see this functionality as huge advantage for our customers. The identity management within Azure Active Directory gives us a amazing, modern REST-based service identity management that we can leverage across all of our cloud deployments."

Benefits

Whereas previously blueballoon personnel had to separately login to multiple different applications from multiple different vendors, like Netsuite, Google Docs, and their calendar tool, with the Windows Azure AD service running on the cloud, blueballoon staff can access their entire cloud-based toolset and IT infrastructure with an SSO, a great improvement over the prior multiple user name/password scenario. Users can now harness the complete stack from a single entry point, with robust scheduling, client management, and billing capabilities. "With Windows Azure Active Directory, we can offer seamless Single Sign On functionality for their users as they traverse between Office 365 and their clinical management software, which they call Blue Chip, essentially a whole scheduling and billing engine that they run their business on," says Collard.

Clinicians working with clients in an outside-the-office setting can enter pertinent information directly onto their tablets or smartphones, with that information immediately "postable" and made available to management and co-therapists. Compared with their previous set of disparate tools, Office 365 has proven much easier to set up and use, and requires much less administrative support. Information collection, access, and exchange are now streamlined, reliable, easy, and secure.

"Every back-end needs a great front-end, and every front-end needs a great back-end," says Tim Fernandes, CaptiveLogix president and co-founder. "With blueballoon, we see the substantial benefits of implementing a Windows Azure AD back-end with an Office 365 front- end. Like a lot of our clients, blueballoon's business isn't technology, in their case it's helping

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children, and they want technology that works without distracting them from their core business focus. Windows Azure AD works beautifully in the background, and it's seamless to users. blueballoon now has one platform, one centralized location, and one identity where they can go in and focus on what they do. And we're finding that Windows Azure AD allows us amazing opportunities going forward with things like integrations with the Windows 8 front-end."
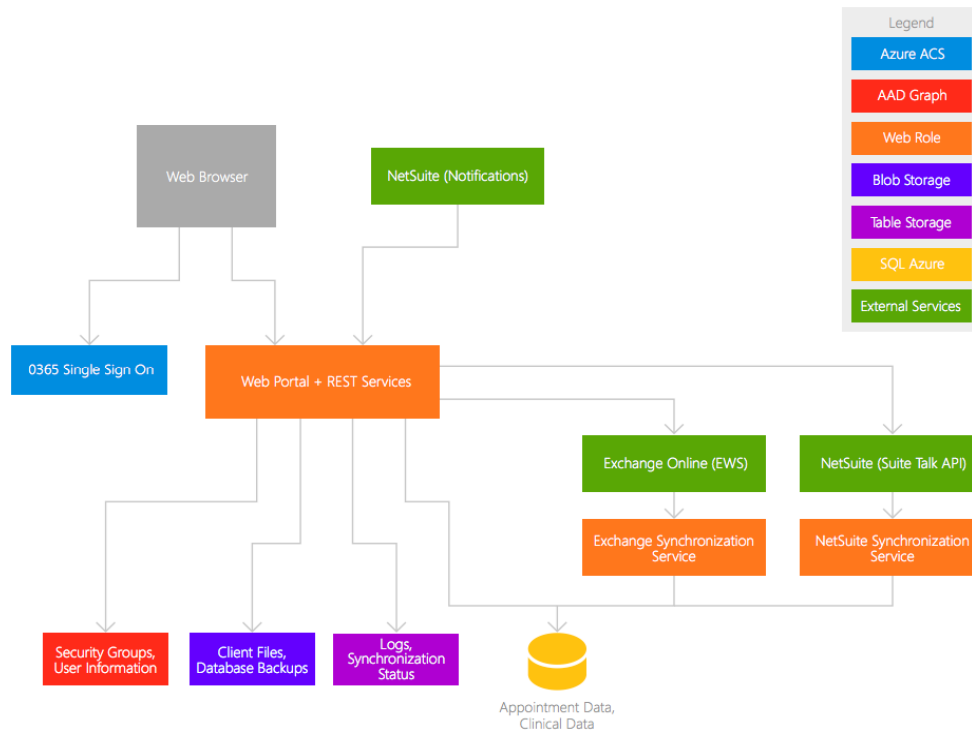
Providing a Secure Directory and SSO for Cloud-based Networks

As an active directory service that lives in the Windows Azure cloud, Azure AD is adept at solving the YAUP problem. Azure AD is a highly scalable, distributed service that runs across many servers in Microsoft data centers around the world. Its security architecture is designed to work efficiently for apps deployed in the Windows Azure cloud, in other cloud operators environments, and on-premises, giving users web-enabled SSO across all of these platforms.

Robert D. Brilliant is a technology writer based in Silicon Valley.

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