

American Data Company finds freedom in the cloud with Force.com



Industry

ISV

Geography

U.S. & Canada (North America)

Challenges

- ⚡ Quickly address client business challenges
- ⚡ Focus on delivering value, not infrastructure
- ⚡ Develop flexible applications that can be easily adapted as client needs change

Solution

American Data Company leverages the Force.com platform to help clients quickly deploy cloud computing solutions to address business issues. With Force.com, the firm can focus on delivering value and let salesforce.com handle the infrastructure.

Result

- ⚡ Force.com-based applications can be developed 5x faster with 80% less effort
- ⚡ More of client budget goes toward providing business value
- ⚡ Salesforce.com provides high level of service delivery

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— Josh Holtzman
President and CEO

Introduction

When Josh Holtzman wanted to strike out on his own, he founded his own consulting business—American Data Company. An experienced software developer, Holtzman knew that many large organizations need assistance when rolling out new Internet technologies. After a client introduced him to salesforce.com, Holtzman quickly refocused his firm around the Force.com platform. Today, American Data Company has grown, established offices in Los Angeles and Toronto, and is one of the fastest growing cloud-computing consulting and technology firms.

The Cloud Revolution

“As soon as I saw salesforce.com, I realized we could spend a lot less time deploying infrastructure,” says Holtzman, while describing his motivations for shifting the firm’s focus to the Force.com platform. “In the early days it used to take us days or weeks to provision and install solutions for our clients. But Force.com changes everything. It lets us focus on solving business challenges, not keeping the lights on.”

American Data’s own operational experience supports Holtzman’s decision. As a Microsoft partner, the firm was given free licenses of Microsoft Dynamics for its own CRM needs. According to Holtzman, “After we installed the software we discovered how cumbersome it was to maintain. We used it for a while, then we evaluated salesforce.com. Given how much work we had to do to maintain the Microsoft system, we decided it was a better investment to pay for salesforce.com licenses which enabled us to better focus our time on meeting our clients’ needs.”

Today, American Data Company provides cloud-computing consulting services for a long list of mid-market and enterprise customers including marquee names like eBay, Farmers Insurance, and Thomson Reuters. The firm helps clients reach their goals by pairing business processes with customized enterprise cloud-computing solutions. “With Force.com,” says Holtzman, “We can add value where it really counts.”

Building a Successful Cloud Business

Like other cloud consultants, American Data Company typically has faster development cycles and shorter engagements than traditional firms. According to Holtzman, “We can leverage production environments and the Force.com sandbox to spin things up quickly. We iterate more over time and ultimately build better solutions.”

The cloud world moves quickly, so one of American Data Company’s priorities is making sure the team keeps up to speed. “You need to always be open to new ideas,” Holtzman says. “For example, salesforce.com publishes updates three times a year, so three times a year our team needs to review the updates. That in turn drives opportunity three times a year to reach out to clients and let them know how they can leverage new functionality.”

Another transformation in the cloud era is the decline of on-premise consulting. American Data Company has limited in-person interaction with its geographically distributed client base to strategic points within an engagement. “It’s easy to build and share a prototype using the Force.com sandbox. Companies that historically spent a large part of their consulting budget covering travel and expenses now see a greater portion of their investment yielding results,” comments Holtzman. “It’s a much better system.”

True Independence with Force.com

As one of the first consultants developing native Force.com applications, Holtzman appreciates how quickly new applications can be built with the platform. He comments, “Analysts say Force.com requires 80% less effort than Java, and that it is five times faster to work with. We’ve surely seen that first hand. With traditional, on premise deployments, roughly 80% of the solution is developed from the ground

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up, and only 20% comes from leveraging available tools. You see the opposite with Force.com—80% is point and click.” Holtzman also adds, “This doesn’t mean that good design principals get thrown out the door. Instead it means that companies can accomplish more in less time.”

Holtzman enjoys the freedom to focus on delivering value. “With traditional, on-premise software deployments, the resources required to keep the lights on—purchasing, installing, and maintaining servers, building in redundancy, etc.—can take up to 70% of a budget, with only 30% actually dedicated to providing business value. But with Force.com our clients are no longer burdened with that.”

With Force.com, American Data Company and their clients are also freed from worrying about performance, uptime, and security—all are managed by salesforce.com’s infrastructure, and perform at the same levels as leading business and financial Web applications. “To advise a client and say that we can build you an enterprise-grade application on the same infrastructure used by Citibank or Dell provides a lot of weight,” says Holtzman. “And I surely sleep better at night knowing that salesforce.com is watching over the infrastructure our clients’ applications are running on.”

Matches Made in Heaven

American Data has launched many successful Force.com applications. For Lactagen, a company which provides solutions for lactose intolerance, American Data created an automated drip email campaign to more effectively target leads during the sales cycle. Another application, developed for eBay, helps its top seller account management team more effectively communicate with sellers. One of Holtzman’s most memorable engagements was for a popular matchmaking company that was faced with the challenge of absorbing multiple acquisitions while revamping a paper-based system—that wouldn’t scale—for matching clients with prospective life partners.

According to Holtzman, “Our client commissioned the development of a Java application. As it turned out, the developer—not our firm—took many months to build the app and charged the client over six figures. The final product was hosted on a single server with minimal security and no ability to scale as our client continued to grow. It was difficult to adapt; configuring new reports sometimes took over a week and could cost hundreds of dollars.”

After American Data Company introduced its client to Force.com, the matchmaker quickly agreed to scrap its Java investment and let American Data Company migrate the information to the cloud. According to Holtzman, “The Force.com app was built in ½ the time at ½ the cost and provides all the security, performance, and flexibility that the client needs.”

No Limits In The Cloud

Whenever American Data Company builds applications, the company looks for ways to offer them to other salesforce.com users. For example, the Professional Services Timer tracks billable hours for team projects, and is available for free on the Force.com AppExchange. “We developed it for our own use, but we saw an opportunity to give something back to the community,” Holtzman explains. The demand for the Professional Services Timer is clear. Today it is one of the top time and expense management apps on the AppExchange.

While American Data Company remains primarily a service-based organization, Holtzman isn’t ruling out the possibility of adding a product portfolio. “We’ve actually helped a number of other companies develop their own products—Web analytics and such—for the AppExchange. But right now consulting and implementations are what we do best, and we continue to refine and expand our practice areas to the best meet the needs of our clients.”

As the cloud computing revolution continues, Holtzman expects demand for American Data Company’s services to remain strong—it continues to grow its consulting practice around the Force.com platform and is building practice areas around other cloud computing leaders such as Amazon Web Services. Not only does American Data Company have years of cloud computing expertise, but it also has strong relationships with all of the leading cloud computing providers, which helps its projects run smoothly.

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