



Madrileña Red de Gas

Data center migration to AWS, including SAP systems

The utility company carried out an ambitious migration process to AWS of all their IT infrastructure, including their critical SAP systems.

In 2018, Madrileña Red de Gas (MRG) decided to migrate its data centre to the public cloud. The gas supply company, founded in 2010, today supplies gas to 59 municipalities in the Madrid Autonomous Region, including the capital itself, and already has more than one million customers. In terms of supply points, **it is the third largest gas supplier in Spain**, currently servicing more than 898,000.

The company, which has been steadily expanding its business and increasing its customer base since day one, is clear that customer focus is key to its continued development and, consequently, efficiency and innovation is not just something it insists on, but an integral part of its DNA.



The Challenge

In the beginning, the company looked to **increase its responsiveness through an IT strategy based on data centre outsourcing**. “We are not a business that wants to focus all of our time and effort on technology, so we opted to find a partner who could manage our systems and infrastructures for us. Similarly, we didn’t want to invest in owning IT assets, so **we needed an all-in-one solution**”, explains Glen Lancaster, the company’s Director of Systems and Customer Operations.

Working with a reliable service provider is a strategy that remains viable today, but as time passed, the model proved unable to offer the scalability the firm needed. “Although the service was 100% outsourced, every time we asked for something new, we had to go through the whole process of negotiating costs and delivery times again. **We needed to operate within a more flexible framework and move beyond those limitations**”, adds the director.

The organization also wanted to reduce recurrent infrastructure costs by broadening its options and moving away from a flat-rate tariff towards a pay-per-use model. “It’s a more equitable and advantageous model for IT management. We were looking for more transparency and flexibility because we knew our usage requirements would change”, says Lancaster.

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It was for those reasons that **Madrileña Red de Gas invited service providers specialising in private cloud, hybrid cloud, and public cloud to submit their proposals for the company**. The proposal put forward by Amazon Web Services (AWS) was selected as the winner. On this decision, the Systems Director explains, “What really convinced us to migrate our data centre was our vision for the future. Moving our infrastructure to the cloud is just the first step”.

But, given that 80% of its business is managed by SAP systems including the critically important SAP Utilities (IS-U), the cornerstone software for the sector, and SAP NetWeaver, the development, provision, and management platform for applications across a heterogeneous software environment, it was also imperative for the energy supplier to find a partner who could reliably deliver on specialist SAP cloud consultation and solutions.

To find this specialist the company put out another request for tender. Proposals were submitted by two large consultancies and two smaller businesses. “**We found Syntax, the chosen firm, through a web search had some conversations with Syntax and AWS, where they demonstrated how they handle similar customer environments, continually reducing complexity and costs while improving performance, optimizing capacity and solve problems. It was the proactive managed service we needed**”.

We were also attracted by its size. We believed a smaller business could be more responsive and fit in better with our way of working. We might be a large utility company, but in IT we want to match the spirit of innovation, responsiveness, and efficiency you would normally find in an SME”, states Glen Lancaster.

The Solution

Under the guidance of its partner, **MRG moved towards the new model with its sights firmly set on the advantages to be gained from moving its systems to the cloud. In just over two months it had completed 90% of its data centre migration.** This was followed by a period of stabilization during which it fundamentally concentrated on the challenges posed by certain applications which, as a result of their architecture, were not compatible with cloud environments.

Both MRG and Syntax are aware of the complexity of the project they undertook: “All the systems were moved, including the critical ones. This was a bold move because, as yet, there have been very few one-shot data centre migrations to the public cloud”, reflects Lancaster.

“The AWS migration was my first contact with an agile methodology for infrastructure,” says Lancaster. “At our daily meetings, I would often be surprised that the Syntax team was already working on elements I had on my agenda. Syntax also invested considerable time in understanding the business impact of everything it did and how its actions affected end users.”

Now that its journey to the cloud has come to an end, the organization advises that, with any initiative of this kind, it is essential to bear the following in mind:

- **System up to date**
To facilitate the process and ensure the correct transfer of knowledge, it’s important that the original system setup is well documented and up to date.
- **Preventing delay**
Do not regard it as just a technical process. It requires methodology and coordination between different business departments and a multitude of suppliers. This will prevent delays.
- **Fast solutions**
Not all applications will be cloud-friendly, and this should be dealt with before it becomes problematic
- **Double check**
When the project is finished, a system audit should be carried out to confirm that everything is working as it should be, identify possible areas for improvement, and, of course, to document the new setup.

“The data centre migration was much more than just a mere technical procedure and it required coordination between many MRG providers and departments. As a result of this, a great amount of business sensitivity was required, both on our part, and from Syntax”, summarizes the Director.

The Benefits

Having completed the “lift and shift” process the company is satisfied with the result. The most immediate benefit for MRG has been the flexibility it has gained in the cloud. It can shrink or grow resources on demand according to business need, resulting in around 10 percent lower costs. **“We can also get services to our internal users faster,” says Lancaster.** “If a business unit needs a rapid response to an issue, we can get a proof of concept ready in a few days because we can spin up the necessary infrastructure so quickly. Before, it could take months.”

MRG has also taken the opportunity to reframe its service-level agreements with Syntax to focus on user experience rather than IT metrics. “We’re not techies, so knowing that a server has a certain uptime or is performing at a certain level means nothing if my end users are suffering,” says Lancaster. **“Syntax guarantees the key transactions we need will happen at certain speeds—it’s up to Syntax to provide the AWS resources to enable that. It’s a new type of relationship that works really well for us.”**

“We found Syntax and we thought its knowledge and experience in SAP systems would make it a good fit. We were also attracted by its size. We believed a smaller business could be more responsive and fit in better with our way of working. We might be a large utility company, but in IT we want to match the spirit of innovation, responsiveness, and efficiency you would normally find in an SME”

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The Future

In the short term, **Madrileña Red de Gas wants to capitalize on cloud by optimizing those areas receptive to increased scalability, flexibility, and responsiveness, whilst at the same time looking to drive down costs.** Working alongside Syntax as its partner in these new initiatives it aims to rethink its architecture, be able to switch equipment on and off more dynamically and begin using the reservation model offered by the cloud platform.

With the migration complete, MRG can focus on reducing costs and redesigning some apps to work better in the cloud. Lancaster says, “We’ve taken back control of our application hosting, but we’re also excited about the opportunities for innovation. **AWS technologies for big data and machine learning, for example, have lowered the barrier to innovation for small teams like ours.**” One project in the pipeline is a new serverless architecture using AWS Lambda and AWS Fargate, which could host MRG’s virtual office services, mobility applications, and meter-reading services.

ABOUT SYNTAX

Since 1972, Syntax has been providing comprehensive technology solutions to businesses of all sizes with thousands of customers trusting Syntax with their IT services and ERP needs. Today, Syntax is a leading Managed Cloud Provider for Mission Critical Enterprise Applications.

Syntax has undisputed strength to implement and manage ERP deployments (Oracle, SAP) in a secure, resilient, private, public or hybrid cloud. With strong technical and functional consulting services, and world class monitoring and automation, Syntax serves corporations across a diverse range of industries and markets.

Syntax has offices worldwide, and partners with Oracle, SAP, AWS, Microsoft, IBM, HPE, and other global technology leaders. Learn more about Syntax at www.syntax.com.



Syntax Systems GmbH & Co. KG
(ehemals Freudenberg IT GmbH & Co. KG)
Höhnerweg 2-4
69469 Weinheim, Germany
+49 (0)6201 80-8008
kontakt@syntax.com

WWW.SYNTAX.COM/EN-EU



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