



Vetco keeps tails wagging with help from the cloud

“With PetPass, we now have the digital backbone in place to extend all sorts of new capabilities that will further enhance our service to customers and their loyalty to us.”

Scott Bentzel, Director of IT, Vetco Clinics



Americans spent more than US\$60 billion on their pets in 2015.¹ That figure corresponds to the elevation of pets from mere backyard beasts to beloved family members who sleep in our beds. Vetco Clinics, a subsidiary of Petco, a leading pet specialty retailer, helps Americans keep those family members healthy with preventive services such as vaccinations and diagnostic screening. Its aim is to build long-term relationships with families, but to do so, Vetco needs to make the customer experience quick, smooth, and personal.

¹ http://www.americanpetproducts.org/press_industrytrends.asp

“The one thing that’s challenging about Azure is keeping up with all the new services. It felt good to have someone at our side to help us make the right decisions and answer questions. UDT was our guide along the way and serves as a beacon to ensure that we are choosing the right services and developing our Azure-based applications in the most efficient and cost-effective way.”

Scott Bentzel, Director of IT,
Vetco Clinics



When Bowser is happy, everybody’s happy

The queue of customers waiting for the Vetco clinic to open can be long and the crowd impatient. Families line up with dogs and cats, waiting to get vaccinations, health screenings, microchips, and other care for their furry family members.

When the clinic finally opens, customers eagerly wait their turn as the line inches forward. The animals are anxious, the owners restless. The clinic staff rifles through paper, not sure who’s been there before. And there’s lots of paperwork to fill out. Some customers drift away, possibly never to return.

This is often the customer intake scenario today at Vetco Saturday-morning clinics. Vetco Clinics is owned by leading pet specialty retailer Petco, which has about 1,430 locations across the US, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. Vetco provides services

in approximately 1,200 of those locations on evenings and weekends, and its veterinary crews often travel from store to store visiting multiple locations.

Petco wants to build long-term relationships with customers and be more than the place where customers buy dog food. It wants a deep, life-long tie to customers, and helping pets stay healthy is an important way to do that. It’s installing permanent Vetco Wellness Centers in all new and remodeled stores and upping its investment in pet health.

However, before Vetco could grow, management knew that it had to get digital processes in place for intaking patients, recording and managing health data, and managing customer relationships. Everything was paper-based. “We’d tried several times to find an off-the-shelf digital solution but never found the right fit,” says Scott Bentzel, Director of IT at Vetco Clinics. “We finally realized we had to build our own.”

Go to the cloud

For development help, Vetco engaged Tribridge, a technology services firm specializing in business applications and cloud solutions. Vetco and Tribridge agreed that cloud was the way to go in order to speed delivery, reduce costs, and achieve on-demand scalability. “We elected to build a web-based application rather than a true mobile app for budgetary reasons and also for the flexibility that a web model provided,” Bentzel says. “We would have no store infrastructure to maintain and could change the application more easily.”

Adds Jeff Lynn, President of Tribridge, “Working closely with Vetco, we were able to customize a cloud solution using Microsoft Azure to solve its unique business needs. This technology grants scalability and reliability to support Vetco’s continued growth and success.”

Bentzel evaluated the leading public cloud vendors, including Amazon Web Services,

Overview

Customer: Vetco Clinics

Customer Website: www.vetcoclinics.com

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Professional services

Employee Size: 800 employees

Partner Names: Tribridge, United Data Technologies

Customer Profile: Vetco Clinics offers affordable vaccination services and preventive veterinary care inside Petco stores during convenient evening and weekend hours. Vetco is owned by Petco and currently operates in approximately 1,200 Petco and Unleashed stores. The company aspires to provide a positive, affordable, professional healthcare option for pet owners.

“Working closely with Vetco, we were able to customize a cloud solution utilizing Microsoft Azure to solve their unique business needs. This technology grants scalability and reliability to support their continued growth and success.”

Jeff Lynn, President, Tribridge



and ended up selecting Microsoft Azure. “I’d had experience with Azure, as had Tribridge, and was impressed with all the services,” Bentzel says. “I’ve watched the evolution of Azure, and it’s mind-blowing the pace at which Microsoft is producing new services. Everything we needed was there, in a nice, neat package.”

Vetco made the decision to acquire its Azure services through United Data Technologies (UDT), a member of the Microsoft Cloud Solution Provider program. By choosing the Cloud Solution Provider model for Azure over its existing Microsoft Enterprise Agreement, Vetco was able to use Azure services on a true consumption basis while also gaining local support from UDT. Through this program, Microsoft partners resell Microsoft cloud services and provide local support to customers.

“The one thing that’s challenging about Azure is keeping up with all the new services,” Bentzel says. “It felt good to have someone at our side to help us make the right decisions and answer questions. UDT was our guide along the way and serves as a beacon to ensure that we are choosing the right services and developing our Azure-based applications in the most efficient and cost-effective way.”

Tribridge used Azure to build the PetPass application, which is a combination customer relationship management and electronic medical records system. In running PetPass on the Azure platform, Vetco will take advantage of a range of Azure services, including SQL Azure and Microsoft SQL Server running in Azure Virtual Machines for transaction processing, as well as Azure App Service and Azure Web Apps for web hosting. The company also will rely on Azure Search for web traffic analytics, Azure Redis Cache for data management, Azure Storage, and Microsoft Visual Studio Application Insights for problem troubleshooting.

Build loyal customer relationships

PetPass will help forge stronger relationships at every customer touchpoint. When a customer walks up, a mobile Vetco greeter carrying a tablet computer will welcome him or her. Using PetPass running on the tablet, the greeter will capture basic information such as customer and pet names, cell phone number, and reason for visit, and provide the customer with an estimated wait time. If the customer has been there before, PetPass knows and auto-fills the information, leaving the greeter to simply confirm.

The whole process takes a minute or two, and the customer is then free to shop in the Petco store while waiting. No more standing in line with agitated animals.

The Vetco staff sends the customer a text message when it’s her turn. The customer brings her pet into the clinic, where a quick consultation takes place about why Fido or Fluffy is there. Everything is recorded in PetPass. The vet technician then sees Fido and performs the exam, draws blood, inserts a microchip, or performs other care, recording medical information in PetPass. Everything’s digital, which increases accuracy and also speeds staff access to patient history.

Even before the customer walks out the Petco door, Vetco has sent her an email message containing a description of the services performed, relevant rabies or other vaccination certifications, and a copy of the invoice.

Deliver PetPass quickly, ensure availability

Vetco knew that it wasn’t going to build and staff a datacenter to run PetPass, which would be cost-prohibitive. “Azure had everything we needed; why would we build our own datacenter?” asks Bentzel. “Having

Azure resources available let development begin immediately and allows us to cost-effectively run and maintain PetPass.” By using Azure through UDT and the Cloud Solution Provider model, Vetco has a more flexible consumption model and ongoing cloud guidance and support.

Because PetPass is a web-based app that runs 100 percent in the cloud, availability is critical. “With the uptime levels guaranteed by Microsoft and the Azure georeplication option, we have complete confidence in our ability to run PetPass in Azure and deliver uninterrupted business continuity,” Bentzel says. “All we need to deliver PetPass is a tablet and an Internet connection. I don’t need anything in the store.”

Scale easily, keep data safe

Vetco currently operates mostly on evenings and weekends, so it has very “spiky” traffic. Azure scales automatically so that Vetco’s small IT staff doesn’t have to worry about provisioning servers to meet peak demands. From a longer-term perspective, Azure gives Vetco the scalability to smoothly expand its PetPass infrastructure as the Petco and Vetco businesses grow.

Although pet health data is not governed by data protection regulations as is human health data, Bentzel says that could well be on the way. Even without regulatory requirements to meet, Vetco wants to keep pet and family data safe. It uses Microsoft Azure Active Directory Premium (part of the Microsoft Enterprise Mobility Suite) to help safeguard access to data through multifactor authentication, and Azure AD Connect to connect its on-premises Active Directory with Azure Active Directory.

Vetco will use other Microsoft Enterprise Mobility Suite products—specifically, Microsoft Intune—to manage its approximately 700 tablets nationwide and control what employees can access from the browser. “We have a lot of turnover in our store workforce so we have to be able to train people quickly and keep information secure,” Bentzel says. “We give them a username and password, and they’re able to reset their own passwords through Azure Active Directory. This is important, because we have such a small IT staff.”

Vetco worked with UDT and members of the Microsoft Cloud Solution Provider team to configure, test, and validate that all elements of the suite were optimized and configured correctly for administration and security. UDT also helped Vetco take advantage of the tight integration between Azure, Intune, and Azure Active Directory.

Make future connections in the cloud

After PetPass is rolled out, Bentzel will begin connecting it to Petco and third-party IT systems, such as those belonging to labs Vetco works with. “Azure provides the right tools and platforms for us to link with Petco and other systems,” he says. “Petco is already in Azure, which makes Azure a good place for us to be. With PetPass, we now have the digital backbone in place to extend all sorts of new capabilities that will further enhance our service to customers and their loyalty to us.”

Software

Microsoft Azure

- Azure App Service
- Azure Redis Cache
- Azure Search
- Azure SQL Database

- Azure Storage
- Azure Virtual Machines
- Azure Virtual Network
- Azure Web Apps

Microsoft Enterprise Mobility Suite

- Azure Active Directory Premium
- Microsoft Intune

Microsoft Visual Studio Application Insights

For more information about other Microsoft customer successes, please visit: www.microsoft.com/customers