SQL Server Advisory Service: a how-to guide

The Northdoor SQL Server Advisory Service is designed to enable clients with sprawling Microsoft SQL Server estates to *understand* them, *evaluate* them and be ready to take *action* to improve them. Particularly for NHS organisations – where central government has estimated potential benefits of up to £66 billion – enabling data-driven operations and analytics can provide enormous efficiency gains and cost savings. The Northdoor service, with a contract duration of one year, is designed to help unlock these benefits by helping clients to transform their data estates.

Elements of the service

There are two essential components:

• a twice-yearly assessment

• an allowance of consultancy time to assist with the delivery of the report's conclusions.

The service is available in three variants: Small, Medium and Large.

The twice-yearly assessment

Target: CFO. The objective is to provide the CFO with the means to understand what the systems are being used for, and the relative risks faced by the organisation. Important: This is not an audit, and in particular it is not a licence audit. Licence-related information will be uncovered as a consequence of the service, but will not be passed to any third party.

> Help clients in the public sector to unlock enormous efficiency gains and cost savings by transforming their data estates.

The assessment comprises five phases, as follows:

Phase 1 – Engagement
During the engagement phase, we introduce ourselves to the client and discuss the advisory process, its objectives and the deliverables. Particularly important is the need to reach agreement regarding any procedural requirements for database and network access, both of which are key to the delivery of a successful outcome.

Phase 2 – Data gathering and analysis
Having agreed the method of access to the source data, we run the MAPS tool on the SQL Estate using WMI. The output from the tool is a comprehensive list of SQL Server instances together with basic server specifications, database instances, versions, editions, components and service packs. To aid the next phase, we produce a one-page summary of this information.

Phase 3 – Consultation
Phase 3 takes the form of a meeting with two purposes: to present the summary and our initial findings, and to work with the client (using the MAPS output) to determine the most important SQL Server instances. A considerably more detailed analysis will be performed on these.

We will suggest likely candidates for the next phase based upon our findings and our opinion, but the client may choose which servers to analyse based upon any criteria. The meeting will also be used to enable us to understand the functional role of each server and to agree database-access methods for detailed data-gathering purposes.

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Store IT · Protect IT · Use IT ·

Engage → **Gather data** → **Consult** → **Analyze** → **Present**

The five phases of the twice-yearly Northdoor assessment

Phase 4 – Detailed data gathering and analysis

Using our own SQL Assessment tool, we interrogate and analyse the SQL instances chosen in Phase 3. The output from this phase is a highly detailed document for each one containing:

- Server specifications
- The SQL environment
- SQL feature configuration
- Backup and high availability
- Security configuration
- Operators and alerting
- Database configuration
- High-level performance statistics
- SQL Server agents

We use the information in this report to

- Evaluate the environment.
- Compare the features of the installed SQL Server to those available in the latest version and, where applicable, suggest ways to use them to improve the service. The functional knowledge gained in the consultation phase is of particular interest here.
- Suggest ways in which data analytics might be applied to enhance the service
- Consider the non-functional aspects of the instances under review: stability, scalability and security.

Phase 5 – Presentation of the results

Finally, we meet with the client to present the documentation, go through our detailed findings and recommendations, and agree next actions.

Consultancy services

We bundle a set number of hours of SQL Server consultancy to be used for advice and remote support purposes. As this it is not intended to be the primary support vehicle for any client, the first-response SLA will be set at next working day. This service may be upgraded to a full Serviceline or Manageline contract.

For more information

For more information on how the Northdoor SQL Server Advisory Service can help public sector organisations modernise their data estates and unlock the benefits of big data, please see Northdoor's Challenge and Solution briefs on the same topic (ask your Northdoor contact for more details).

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