



Ocorian tames its SQL Server landscape with expert managed services from Northdoor

“We chose Northdoor for our SQL Server modernisation project for several reasons: they held all of the relevant Microsoft certifications, supported by a proven track record, combined with compelling pricing. In addition, Northdoor could not only handle the rationalisation and implementation, but also run the new environment as a fully managed service.”


Stuart Geddes, IT Director, Ocorian

Gearing up for global growth

When Ocorian formed through the merger of two businesses, it became the seventh-largest corporate funds and trust player in the world by revenue. To fulfil the growth potential of the merged business, it was vitally important to consolidate and rationalise the two technology stacks.

Stuart Geddes, IT Director at Ocorian, explains: “We needed a new architecture capable of supporting a much larger merged business, and with significant capacity for further growth. The corporate strategy is to continue to scale up through corporate acquisition.”

In addition, global operations mean that the company’s centralised applications and databases need to be up and running 21 hours out of 24. As the working day comes to an end in Ocorian’s Singapore and Hong Kong offices, it’s still morning in the European offices, and the Philadelphia offices are yet to open for the day.

-  Cut annual database costs by 20%
-  Enabled fully automated failover
-  Created platform for business growth

“Our major challenge was the sheer number of databases we were running across the two organisations,” recalls Stuart Geddes. “A system used in our Luxembourg office creates a separate database instance for each client, and so there were more than 3,000 databases just for that!”

Choosing an expert partner

In total, the merging organisations were running 42 instances of Microsoft SQL Server, supporting many thousands of individual databases. The SQL Server environment included multiple software versions—2008 R2, 2012, 2014 and 2016—creating complexity and introducing business risk. To simplify operations, cut costs, and reduce risk, Ocorian wanted to standardise on a single, up-to-date SQL Server version, with a single refresh cycle. Further, to enable effective global operations, Ocorian wanted to reduce outage recovery times and enable non-disruptive software maintenance even during working hours, by implementing a true active-active architecture.

“The managed service from Northdoor costs less than two FTEs, and we also get round-the-clock cover without the ongoing need to train and retain our own specialist in-house staff.”

Stuart Geddes, IT Director, Ocorian

“Our SQL Server landscape is absolutely critical to the business: essentially, all but one of our applications depend on it,” says Stuart Geddes. “That made it equally critical to carefully plan and execute our proposal to rationalise and update the landscape.”

As the internal team did not have experience in managing a unified environment at this scale, Ocorian looked for external assistance. Stuart Geddes says, “We chose Northdoor for several reasons: they held all of the relevant Microsoft certifications, supported by a proven track record, combined with compelling pricing. In addition, Northdoor could not only handle the rationalisation and implementation, but also run the new environment as a fully managed service.”

Ensuring a smooth, low-risk transition

Working with experienced Northdoor consultants, Ocorian conducted a detailed discovery exercise on its entire network to ensure that everything was understood and documented, from physical servers and operating systems up to databases and applications. As the second stage, the joint team designed the future environment, determining in particular the optimal grouping for databases to meet performance requirements while minimising the total number of SQL Server instances. Next, Northdoor and Ocorian built detailed migration plans, validated by running proof-of-concept exercises.

“To avoid carrying legacy issues into the new landscape, we deployed into a brand-new domain from the ground up,” says Stuart Geddes. “In total, we migrated 47 line-of-business applications, all but one with a SQL Server backend. The planning services and project communications from Northdoor were excellent, and

the lead consultant effectively became part of our internal team. Northdoor in general and the consultant in particular really put in the hours and went the extra mile to make sure the outcome was a success.”

The new environment runs across dual active-active data centres in Jersey and Guernsey. Around 95% of the SQL Server environment is hosted in AlwaysOn Availability Groups that automatically move workload and users to the remaining live resources in the event of unexpected downtime. Ocorian can also manually shut down resources without interrupting its applications. The company recently conducted a full disaster-recovery test over the course of two weekends, simulating the loss of power to each data centre in turn. Stuart Geddes says: “There was no impact whatsoever on our applications. As a regulated business operating in the financial services sector, it’s a great benefit to be able to demonstrate our DR capabilities.”

Growing benefits

By consolidating its SQL Server landscape and optimising its software licensing, Ocorian has achieved an approximate 20% reduction in annual costs.

The company is also avoiding additional costs thanks to its managed service contract with Northdoor, as Stuart Geddes explains: “Given the scale of the new landscape, we would have needed at least two dedicated DBAs. The managed service from Northdoor costs less than two FTEs, and we also get 24 hours of cover without the ongoing need to train and retain our own specialist in-house staff. The Northdoor managed service is working well: it’s proactive, it’s cost-effective, and it frees us up to focus on other priorities.”



“The standardisation of our SQL Server landscape and the repeatable processes we’ve established with Northdoor have made it easy—from the IT perspective, at least—to grow the business.”

Stuart Geddes, IT Director, Ocorian

With the unified SQL Server solution in place, Ocorian has seen a clear improvement in database and application performance. Stuart Geddes attributes this to Northdoor’s expertise in reviewing the workload and arranging it across the SQL Server instances in an optimised way. And as Ocorian continues to grow, Northdoor proactively monitors performance and adjusts the SQL Server landscape to balance performance and cost.

Stuart Geddes says, “In addition to improving performance, the work we’ve done with Northdoor greatly reduces business risk, making cybersecurity much easier to manage. With the active-active solution, we can manually move workload away from servers, patch them against new zero-day vulnerabilities, then switch the workload back over so we can patch the remaining systems. The safety net of that high-availability environment, backed by the managed service from Northdoor, gives us confidence that we’re always ready to serve our customers.”

He concludes: “We’ve continued to work with Northdoor post-merger to bolt on a number of smaller corporate acquisitions. The standardisation of our SQL Server landscape and the repeatable processes we’ve established with Northdoor have made it easy—from the IT perspective, at least—to grow the business.”

**Microsoft
Partner**



Gold Cloud Platform
Gold Data Platform
Gold Data Analytics
Gold Application Development
Silver Collaboration and Content

About Ocorian

Ocorian is a global leader in corporate and fiduciary services, fund administration and capital markets. It has US\$270bn in assets under administration and employs over 1,500 professionals.

Supporting and protecting global investment is Ocorian’s priority; it manages over 17,000 structures on behalf of 8,000+ clients including financial institutions, large-scale international organisations, and high-net-worth individuals.

Ocorian provides fully compliant, tailored solutions that are individual to clients’ needs, no matter where in the world they hold financial interests, or however they are structured.

The group offers a full suite of corporate, fund and private client services across a network of offices spanning all the world’s financial hubs. Locations include Bermuda, BVI, Cayman, Denmark, Germany, Guernsey, Finland, Hong Kong, Ireland, Isle of Man, Jersey, Luxembourg, Mauritius, Netherlands, Norway, Singapore, Sweden, UAE, the UK, and the US.

To find out more about Ocorian and its services, including regulatory information, visit www.ocorian.com

