![Northdoor logo — Store IT · Protect IT · Use IT]

Case Study:
Major UK retailer

A large UK retailer feeds growing appetites for business insights with Azure Synapse Analytics

"Northdoor delivered a solution to bring our data seamlessly into the cloud, and architected efficient data pipelines to allow analytics at greater speed and scale than previously possible."

- *Accelerated report generation, cutting time-to-insight*
- *Cut operational costs versus previous IBM Netezza platform*
- *30-minute recovery time in the event of disaster, reducing the risk of business disruption*
- *Auto-shutdown capability optimises costs by only running cloud analytics when required*

About the client

This retailer is one of the largest independents in the UK, with over 400 outlets and 7,000+ employees.

Hungry for analytical insight

To thrive in the ultra-competitive UK grocery space, this retailer must optimise its pricing to ensure strong sales while at the same time safeguarding margins. Every day, thousands of customers make purchases in the company's stores, generating more than 1 TB of daily point-of-sale (POS) data—an invaluable source of information for informed decision-making.

A Lead Project Stakeholder explains: "By processing our enormous POS datasets into actionable intelligence, we help the business to answer key questions such as: 'is this product assortment driving optimal footfall for our stores?' and: 'what is the impact of this pricing strategy on our margins?'"

In the past, the retailer relied on IBM Netezza appliances to ingest and process analytics data. However, this platform had reached end-of-life, significantly raising support costs, and both data-quality and reliability issues were becoming commonplace, impacting the business.

"In recent years, appetites for advanced analytics have grown tremendously, and we knew that our legacy on-premises platform could not accommodate the future requirements," confirms the Lead Project Stakeholder. "To enable next-generation practices such as DataOps, we looked for a new approach."

Recipe for success with Azure Synapse cloud-based analytics

The retailer selected Azure Synapse Analytics as the foundation of its new platform.

"One of our key criteria was scalability, since we know that the volume, velocity and variety of our data and workloads will grow significantly in the years ahead," says the Lead Project Stakeholder. "With a cloud solution, we gain limitless capacity for data growth and processing power. By choosing Azure Synapse Analytics, we can leverage Microsoft's comprehensive cloud analytics product suite. This suite is continuously enhanced based on a technology roadmap that is perfectly aligned with our own future objectives."

"Throughout the process, Northdoor was always willing to go the extra mile to ensure we succeeded, even when that meant going beyond the original project scope."

To accelerate its journey to cloud and reduce the business risk of disruption during the transition to Azure Synapse Analytics, the retailer engaged experts from Northdoor for support with the transformation effort. With deep expertise in both IBM Netezza and Azure Synapse Analytics, Northdoor had the skills and experience to help the company realise its analytics goals—including the adoption of modern DataOps practices backed by infrastructure-as-code capabilities.

"Northdoor proposed much more than an impressive technology solution," continues the Lead Project Stakeholder. "Their consultants created a solution to bring our data seamlessly into the cloud, and they architected efficient data pipelines to allow analytics at greater speed and scale than previously possible. One of the things we valued most about Northdoor is that they were willing to work alongside our team, and transfer the knowledge we required to run, support and expand the platform ourselves in the long term."

Serving up actionable business intelligence

Backed by expert guidance from Northdoor, the retailer implemented and configured its new cloud analytics environment, based on Azure Synapse Analytics, Azure Data Factory and Azure DevOps with Git integration. By utilising Azure Key Vault, the new solution allows fine-grained separation between administrator and developer roles—enhancing information security and data governance.

After running the on-premises and cloud platforms in parallel to verify that the new Azure Synapse Analytics environment was performing as expected, the retailer decommissioned its IBM Netezza appliances and switched over to Azure Synapse Analytics.

"Transitioning to Azure Synapse Analytics was straightforward and seamless for our business users," says the Lead Project Stakeholder. "Today, we send our daily POS data files to Azure, where automated pipelines stage and ingest the data into our data warehouse. The beauty of the cloud is that we can temporarily boost our compute resources to speed up this daily process, then elastically scale them back down again—optimising performance without sending costs soaring. We can perform test restores of our entire environment in just 30 minutes, eliminating our previous concerns around how we would recover in the event of a disaster."

Growth on the menu

Equipped with a future-facing DataOps platform, the retailer is in a strong position to support its business users with the insights they need to meet the challenges of the UK grocery sector for years to come.

"We've accelerated reporting jobs while reducing our operational spend," states the Lead Project Stakeholder. "Crucially, we've now created a framework for analytics that replaces manual work with automated, template-driven processes—saving time and effort, and enabling stronger control and governance throughout the DataOps lifecycle."

Although its journey with Azure Synapse Analytics is just beginning, the retailer is already planning for the future. The organisation has now migrated additional data pipelines to the Azure platform, and is exploring opportunities to move other workloads to the cloud as part of a wider data-centre modernisation effort.

"By working with Northdoor, we've gained the platform and the skills to perform advanced analytics within the cloud," concludes the Lead Project Stakeholder. "Throughout the process, Northdoor was always willing to go the extra mile to ensure we succeeded, even when that meant going beyond the original project scope. We're delighted with what we've achieved, and we look forward to future collaborations with the Northdoor team."