

Laying the ground work to grow cloud opportunities

Spark New Zealand increases its technical readiness and ability to innovate with Premier Support for Partners.





Spark New Zealand
5562 employees

New Zealand
Telecommunications

Spark is the largest traditional digital services provider in New Zealand, with roughly 46% of the market share. Their customers span from consumers to large public sector government departments.

A trusted advisor for digital transformation

Having decades of experience can offer unique perspective to fuel innovation. This rings true for Spark New Zealand, whose founding can be traced back to a division of the New Zealand Post Office in 1987. Today, Spark offers mobile network, fixed line telephony, and ISP services, and is a major information and communications technology provider to New Zealand businesses, government agencies, and consumers via its Spark Digital division.

“Cloud offerings are the fastest growing part of our business,” says GD Taylor, End User Compute Infrastructure Manager at Spark. “We wanted to embrace cloud in a bigger way to expand our capabilities and generate new opportunities, but at the same time we need to meet evolving compliance regulations.” To make this happen and continue satisfying their customers’ SaaS, IaaS, and data center service needs, Taylor’s team decided to migrate to the Microsoft Azure platform and leverage Premier Support for Partners (PSfP) to help them successfully migrate to and use Azure.

The deepest knowledge to anchor cloud environments

Openness, flexibility, and enterprise capability are all enticing aspects of the Azure platform, but Spark wanted to ensure their Azure migration addressed the foundational business questions behind migrating in the first place. Spark had used PSfP services in the past to fully leverage Microsoft technology and better support its customers, so PSfP was their first choice to collaborate on an Azure deployment and optimization plan. Through a series of technical planning sessions, Spark and PSfP outlined an approach that would cover three work streams to better support internal initiatives and future customer projects:

- A business track, focused on managing the financial controls and security around building servers in Azure.
- An infrastructure track, to enable Spark’s server engineers to access infrastructure as code and take advantage of automated provisioning.
- A development track, to improve day-to-day projects by specifying detailed controls for what developers can build without special approval.

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-GD Taylor
EUC Infrastructure Manager
Spark NZ

Moving to Azure meant Spark also needed to address the topic of governance. Through PSfP guidance, Spark learned how they could benefit from the Azure enterprise scaffold—a set of flexible controls and Azure capabilities that provide structure to the environment, and anchors for services built on the public cloud. The enterprise scaffold is intended to be the foundation of each new subscription within Azure, and each is purpose-built to be flexible to support both traditional IT workloads and agile workloads, such as creating customer-ready SaaS applications based on Azure capabilities. This enables Spark’s administrators to ensure workloads meet the minimum governance requirements of the organization without preventing business groups and developers from quickly meeting their goals.

Where Spark’s engineers needed specific Azure training to complement existing skills, PSfP brought in Premier Field Engineers (PFE) to provide tailored trainings in areas such as managing role-based access, cost and system notifications around provisioning new servers, and resource tagging to tie Azure servers to new projects or operational cost codes. “The PFEs also spent time training our infrastructure, networking, and security teams around automated provisioning for Azure,” adds Taylor. “Our dev and test teams are now trained for continuous deployment, so we’re ready to drive frequent, reliable, and compliant releases. With infrastructure that’s provisioned as part of the dev process and a faster overall cadence, we expect a shorter time to realizing value—both for us and our customers.”

A healthier hybrid cloud for internal teams and customers

Spark has also used PSfP services to keep other cloud projects moving smoothly and support healthier IT. “When we migrated to Office 365, we used Premier’s services to make sure we were considering all our options,” says Taylor. Microsoft has a long history of thought leadership and innovation in cloud, and PSfP provides partners access to this technical expertise to expand their own capabilities and better assist customers’ cloud migrations. “We drafted our own designs for how we’d build a hybrid Exchange environment, but we also used PSfP to validate our designs to highlight any issues. Microsoft works in this space every day, and their perspective is very useful.”

Exclusive Premier Support health check services, such as Risk Assessment Program as a Service (RAPS), allow partners and the businesses they support to assess their environment at their convenience, securely and with near-immediate results. “We’ve used Active Directory RAPS and Exchange RAPS assessments in our environment, and we gained unbiased, actionable reports to help us remediate potential issues before they became business-impacting problems,” says Taylor. By having a Microsoft engineer provide recommendations based on their assessment results and transfer that knowledge to their staff and Technical Account Manager (TAM), Spark is better informed, protected, and able to support customers.

Spark has also used PSfP resources to help customers achieve thorough incident resolution and greater peace of mind around Spark’s solutions. “When our customers call saying they’ve got an issue, we often use Premier Support to help us resolve it,” says Taylor. “Whether it’s a significant impact or technical problem for our customers or ourselves, we know that contacting Premier Support will put us in touch with the best resources worldwide to solve the issue.”

Go-to expertise and advocacy, always within reach

Spark has leveraged many features of PSfP to improve its plans for cloud expansion, security posture, and other key criteria, but Taylor believes the greatest feature of PSfP is gaining a strategic, knowledgeable advocate within Microsoft. “Our Technical Account Manager is the crucial glue that puts us in contact with the right people at Microsoft and the right solutions to address our needs. She understands our business, our goals, and how to best help us, whether we have an incident or we’re trying to deliver new business value to our customers.”

Taylor cites an instance when tenant and user-specific issues arose during Spark’s onboarding of Exchange Online. “When you’ve exhausted troubleshooting on your end and answered the foundational questions yourself, you need the solution escalated. That’s when we know we can count on our TAM.” Taylor adds that their TAM was instrumental in quickly assessing the issue on Microsoft’s end and looping in relevant teams, ultimately getting the product team involved and working directly with Spark for faster resolution. “Having a TAM on your side is such an asset. I tell my staff, ‘If you’ve been working on the problem for 24 hours, it’s time to call Microsoft.’ And typically, the issue is resolved much quicker.”

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EUC Infrastructure Manager
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Enterprise-grade resources to capitalize on what's next in the cloud

"If there's one thing I'd recommend to other partners, it's sit down with Microsoft to talk about your real business goals and challenges. There is a good chance PSfP can help you meet some of those goals and challenges by leveraging the full power of Microsoft."

-GD Taylor
EUC Infrastructure Manager
Spark NZ

Following their successful Azure engagement, Spark has increased transparency and collaboration between development and infrastructure teams, gained the ability to track and audit changes in their Azure environment, and established parameters to ensure policies in Azure are enforceable. The expected result? Faster server provisioning in Azure, an advantage Spark will be able to use across its entire business.

New Zealand government agencies make up a large portion of Spark's customer base, and with the government on the verge of defining how it will use cloud-based technologies in a bigger way, Spark looks forward to expanding its cloud portfolio for continued growth and success. "As a company, we are always focused on delivering the best value to our shareholders, so any technology with the potential to increase our business value is attractive to us," says Taylor. "We are on the cusp of doing a lot more with cloud, which should benefit our government and non-government customers alike."

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Reach out to your Microsoft representative or [contact a PSfP expert](#) to determine how Premier Support for Partners can meet your support needs.