

EFFICIENT GROUP CASE STUDY

EFFICIENT
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EFFICIENT GROUP PIONEERS FINANCIAL INNOVATION WITH INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE AND AZURE.

Stepped up security and new levels of scalability positions leading financial services firm to innovate. Leading financial services firm **Efficient Group** is preparing to empower its customers with a revolutionary, single view of the client's financial well-being app, made possible by an infrastructure modernisation programme that included a move to the Azure cloud and improved security.

The pioneering platform, giving users a secure, consolidated and easy-to-use overview of their investments, irrespective of platform or product provider, their performance, and projections, is set to launch later this year. Other financial services products, such as life insurance products (policies), short-term insurance products, wills and employee benefits will also be added to provide the client with a 360-view of all his financial services related products and services.

It will be the first app of its kind for South African investors and is in line with Efficient Group's strategy to harness technology to drive value for

its clients. At the core of this development lies the consolidation of data from a multitude of financial services providers into one Efficient group database – the single view of and for the client.

Heiko Weidhase, CEO of Efficient Group, notes that most South Africans don't save enough for retirement because they don't fully understand how much they have invested, where it is invested and how it is performing. He also believes that seeing what their investments are projected to provide them at retirement will help them invest better. He notes that the app, which has been a work in progress for ten years, was not possible without the advanced digital solutions now available, the scalability of the cloud, improved connectivity and the enhanced security now wrapped around the solution.

The new app is just one of the innovations the company aims to roll out in future, on the back of a move to Azure that included an infrastructure and security upgrade carried out by Microsoft partner Braintree.

CHALLENGE

Given that they have over 500 employees and work with around 200 financial advisors across South Africa, productivity, security and compliance were major concerns for the Efficient Group, particularly as a large percentage of their work force works remotely and in the field. It was quickly identified that a risk management strategy needed to be implemented to improve their cybersecurity posture.

Even more so as they had to adapt quickly to the new world of hybrid work while ensuring security, and compliance with regulations such as PoPIA (Protection of Personal Information Act). Efficient Group needed to solve some complex data sharing problems and mitigate the risk of common threats such as phishing emails and social engineering threats.

An in-depth Braintree Security Strategy workshop and a Microsoft Cybersecurity Assessment revealed insights into areas of security vulnerabilities, based on data from infrastructure, operating systems and workstation scanning. An audit of the environment also indicated that the ageing and increasingly complex infrastructure did not interoperate as efficiently as it could have. A wealth of Microsoft opportunities were uncovered. Efficient Group was fully onboarded to Microsoft 365 and its data centre transformed and moved to Azure.

“Our company is rapidly moving to deliver a digital client experience. Financial services have historically been technology laggards, but we are building platforms that will make us a pioneer, based on future proof infrastructure.”
Heiko Weidhase, CEO Efficient Group

THE SOLUTION

With data standards growing and becoming more complex, Braintree recommended fully integrated solutions for the entire Efficient Group. This supported their need for collaboration and addressed the complexity of data exchanges between financial advisors and their clients. Most importantly, it also supported compliance requirements and fell within the boundaries of PoPIA. Efficient Group is now running on a 96% Microsoft Secure score, in line with international best practice.

Achieving a wrap-around experience is one of the greatest advantages of working with Microsoft and Braintree. Azure was recommended to provide a secure, powerful foundation on which to seamlessly integrate all the business and productivity processes provided. As Efficient Group’s managed services partner, Braintree also helped the client accelerate new and more modern apps, including payroll and extensions of dashboards.

Microsoft Teams was put forward as a solution for managing the Efficient Groups’ diverse teams and their vast number of emails, online

video calls, collaborative spreadsheets and documents shared between employees while working from multiple locations. Braintree also reviewed licenses and productivity suites, and ensured proper licence allocation to avoid under utilisation and overspending.

Understanding that security presents a reputational risk to an organisation, plus that technology drives business progress, Efficient Group’s C-suite worked closely with Braintree to oversee the transformation.

By partnering with Braintree and Microsoft, Efficient Group not only gained a deeper understanding of their company’s security needs, but also the tools to take hybrid work and value creation to the next level.

“Efficient Group will achieve the ability to use historical data for analysis. We’re looking at AI and pulling institutional IP into a proper dataverse, where it can be put to good use.”
Doug Morrison, Strategic Head Microsoft 365 Braintree.

IMMEDIATE GAINS

Technology underpins two of Efficient Group's five key value creation plans, and the company's infrastructure is now sufficiently secure and future-proof to support its strategies. The group is developing advanced client and advisor interfaces, and moving to optimise the value of its extensive data repositories. A key milestone enabled by the new environment will be the launch of its financial well-being app for mobile and desktop, to be released later this year. The app will integrate with a multitude of product providers, empowering clients and advisors to work together to achieve better outcomes.

As a fast growing company, Efficient Group also has a programmatic acquisition strategy in which new businesses join the company. The Microsoft cloud environment simplifies acquisition and integration of new businesses into the group, offering scalable storage and processing capacity. The cloud-based environment prepared Efficient Group for a smooth move to remote work during the Covid-19 lockdowns, and indeed enabled the group to enjoy its best ever growth phase during the pandemic. Post-Covid, it allows the company to retain top staff by offering a flexible and remote working environment.

"The modernisation not only allows Efficient Group to accelerate innovation – it also prepared them well for the Covid-19 lockdowns. Their transition to remote work was seamless in terms of security and productivity." Chris Badenhorst, Strategic Head Azure Braintree

"With Microsoft, the interoperability of the products eliminates complicated development. As partners, we are reaping the rewards of the investments Microsoft has made over the past 8 years across security for infrastructure, networks, applications and devices – so we have a totally robust solution to take to market." Doug Morrison, Strategic Head Microsoft 365 Braintree.

PRODUCT & SERVICES PROVIDED:	Microsoft 365, Microsoft Azure (Integrated Microsoft solution, focused on security and modernisation.)
ORGANISATION SIZE:	500-1000 employees
INDUSTRY:	Financial services
COUNTRY:	South Africa
BUSINESS NEED:	A risk management strategy to improve their cybersecurity posture, organisation wide collaboration and simplified data sharing..

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