Miami Community Spurs Economic Development Through Technology Transformation

Microsoft CityNext

The Miami-Dade Community—including Miami-Dade County, the City of Miami, and Miami-Dade County Public Schools—is setting the stage for far-reaching revitalization following its recovery from an economic downturn. From working with Microsoft, local officials recognized the opportunities that awaited citizens and businesses in providing advanced technologies, training, and job opportunities—not only in the local region but also as part of its role as the gateway to Latin American commerce.

Summary

Miami-Dade County, the City of Miami, and Miami-Dade County Public Schools teamed up with Microsoft to streamline government operations, close gaps in digital access and skills, and spark economic growth by using:

- **Cloud-based productivity tools.** City employees and school district students will use Microsoft Office 365 for anywhere access to documents, automated workflow processes, collaboration capabilities, and communications tools such as instant messaging and video conferencing.
- **High-availability services.** The City of Miami is taking advantage of the Microsoft Azure cloud platform to support disaster recovery and stay online, even in hurricane season.
- **Flexible devices.** The county and city government are replacing laptops with Microsoft Surface tablets for employees whose jobs require them to work in multiple locations. The school district is providing students with laptop and tablet devices as part of its digital convergence initiative.
- **Microsoft youth programs.** The community has taken part in the Microsoft YouthSpark initiative to bring together regional leaders to share ideas and help young people overcome the gap between those who have access to skills and training, and those who don't.
- **Entrepreneurial assistance.** A Microsoft Innovation Center in Miami will support students, entrepreneurs, and startup businesses with the resources to help drive job creation, increase the number of highly skilled technology specialists, and facilitate collaboration.
- **Ongoing training and technology support.** The county, city, and school district are using the resources at the Microsoft Store and the Microsoft Educator Network for community-based technology education, technical support, and professional development.

Miami-Dade County is putting in place programs and tools to help all its citizens. It is a leading example of what a coordinated approach to innovation can do for a community.

Customers: Miami-Dade County, City of Miami, Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Country or Region: United States
Industry: Regional government, education
Partners: ConQuest Technology Services, HP, United Data Technologies, Venture Hive

Profile: Miami-Dade County, the City of Miami, and Miami-Dade County Public Schools make up the core of government and education services for the more than 2.5 million residents of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Microsoft Software and Services:
- Microsoft Azure
- Microsoft Office 365
  — Microsoft Exchange Online
  — Microsoft Lync Online
  — Microsoft SharePoint Online
- Microsoft Surface
- Services and Programs
  — Microsoft BizSpark
  — Microsoft Innovation Center
  — Microsoft Store
  — Microsoft YouthSpark
- Technologies
  — Active Directory

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→ "Thanks to our alliance with Microsoft, we'll be able to ... break new ground in civic innovation and technological excellence."

Carlos Gimenez, Mayor of Miami-Dade County

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The Full Story

The Drive to Expand Regional Leadership

When most people think of Miami, Florida, they picture endless beaches, gleaming cruise ships, and fiery Latin music. The area's government officials want to expand that picture so that the name Miami also implies technology innovation. The Miami area is already considered the gateway to Latin America in terms of commerce and tourism; the next step in a revitalization process is to attract technology startups that aim to develop local business for a healthier economy.

For any organization to achieve international leadership, it must first ensure that its internal workings are in order. A key step toward this for local government officials from Miami-Dade County and the City of Miami and was to streamline business processes and make them more transparent so that it would be easier for citizens and companies to use government services. At the same time, Miami-Dade County Public Schools sought to build on recent achievements and find new ways to help its exceptionally diverse student body overcome the "digital divide"—the gap between those who have access to information technology and those who do not—for future success. And stakeholders throughout the area recognized that Miami needed to foster opportunities for job seekers and become a business incubator to encourage economic growth.

However, making such a transformation would be no easy task, especially under the circumstances. As a result of the United States financial crisis, Florida suffered a severe economic downturn in 2008. The once booming real estate industry ground to a halt, with a significant number of foreclosures across Miami. Residents elsewhere had less money in their pockets and could not afford to travel, so the area's tourism industry also weakened. Local governments saw a reduction in tax revenue, which meant that they could not invest in new projects or infrastructure upgrades. Instead, municipal governments had to focus resources on maintaining their aging infrastructure.

A New Beginning, a Transformational Partnership

As the Florida economy began to recover, government officials in the Miami area could take a fresh look at how they wanted their organizations to function. Collectively, the county, city, and school district saw opportunities to both serve their constituents and jump-start the economy by making the entire area more technology savvy, whether by providing training at schools and in the community, creating jobs for new workers, attracting venture capitalists, or promoting closer engagement with businesses and citizens.

In an effort to identify the right technology solutions to shape the area's economic and technological future, government officials reviewed their existing provider relationships to see whether furthering any of them made sense. "Many of our business partners had great individual, targeted solutions," says Miami-Dade County Information Technology Director, Angel Petisco. "But we found that only Microsoft had the breadth of offerings that we would likely need, from public-sector experience and technical expertise to educational resources and flexible products and services."

Through its evaluation process, government officials learned about the Microsoft CityNext initiative, a program that accelerates innovation in urban areas by harnessing the ideas, energy, and expertise of local people to create a healthier, safer, and more sustainable place to live. As a first step, Miami-Dade County entered into a Microsoft digital alliance agreement to explore how Microsoft and local public-sector organizations could work together to respond to some of the area's challenges. The agreement, which began in February 2014, would help boost the local economy through heightened digital literacy, career readiness, and an enhanced focus on innovation and entrepreneurship. "By working together, Miami-Dade and Microsoft can prioritize our resources; pool our expertise, skills, and energies; and ultimately offer relevant, new digital services to citizens while helping to create jobs for residents," says Carlos Gimenez, Mayor of Miami-Dade County.

Smarter Government

The City of Miami had a choice to make when formulating its strategy for cloud-based technologies. Its chief information officer had experience elsewhere with Google offerings, but he and the city ultimately selected Microsoft as the first all-up cloud services provider for the City of Miami. The city has already identified several solutions that will drive widespread efficiency gains. For example, it is upgrading the productivity tools that its employees use every day by adopting Microsoft Office 365, a suite of productivity, communications, and collaboration cloud services. The city is working with ConQuest Technology Services, a member of the Microsoft Partner Network, on the planning and deployment. Employees will use a special version of the suite—Microsoft Office 365 for Government—that stores United States–based government data in a segregated cloud that includes extra levels of security. Having a cloud-based solution from Microsoft will help the city with disaster recovery, which is important in hurricane-prone Florida. The city also will be able to use the discovery and retention capabilities in Office 365 to speed fulfillment of public records requests, an important step in satisfying the growing demand for more transparent government.

The City of Miami foresees using multiple Office 365 components to streamline business processes and facilitate interactions with the public. It plans to use Microsoft Lync Online to connect more conveniently with citizens and respond more promptly to their needs. For example, when citizens want to build or alter their homes, their general contractor, plumber, electrician, and any other stakeholders must physically present plans to the Building Department office for approval. But, by using Lync Online, they could join an online video conference using either Lync or Skype communications software and review plans virtually, which would save time and money. To advance collaboration, City employees will also use Lync Online for instant messaging, presence, and audio conferencing on their desktop computers or on nearly any mobile device through Lync for Mobile Clients.

The city also anticipates using Microsoft SharePoint Online to automate its currently manual workflow processes, such as vacation requests and meeting agenda reviews. The city can use built-in workflows to streamline the document review process, maintain version control by tracking employees' revisions, and avoid clogging the city's email system with numerous iterations of the same document. "Making process improvements like these throughout the city government will add to employee efficiency and accountability," says City Manager Daniel Alfonso.

Because Office 365 is cloud-based, the City of Miami can reduce its hardware infrastructure and increase its availability and uptime, which removes certain compliance hurdles and releases IT staff from the burden of ongoing maintenance. "The move to Office 365 lets us retire our older systems while giving our employees the tools that they need to stay productive from anywhere," says Chief Information Officer Kevin Burns. "Plus, we're conserving financial resources: we expect that using Office 365 will save us more than [US]$500,000 annually in hardware, operations, and deployment savings."
In addition, the city is turning to the Microsoft Azure cloud platform to replicate its Active Directory environment for authentication for all systems. That scenario will also contribute to higher availability for employees and better business continuity, because they can avoid being affected by weather and disaster-related outages.

To further promote employee productivity, the City of Miami is replacing employees' laptop computers with Microsoft Surface Pro tablets that support various applications such as those used for enterprise resource planning, financial management and budgeting, payroll and human resources, and permitting. Working with the Microsoft Store in Miami to provide mobile device management and training, the city is deploying the Surface tablets to executives, technicians, developers, planners, trainers, inspectors, firefighters, and police—employees who need to work in multiple locations or whose jobs require mobility.

"The demand for tablets is growing, and we expect to meet that demand primarily with Surface devices," says Marco Sanchez, Network Administrator at the City of Miami. "We conducted a comprehensive analysis of other products on the market, and we found that Surface devices met our needs best in terms of performance, application compatibility, multitasking behavior, and user experience." Miami-Dade County also is beginning to adopt Surface tablets for its mobile employees, starting with its Building Department.

Bridging the Digital Divide

In addition to transforming government operations, Miami-area leaders and Miami-Dade County Public Schools have already made considerable strides in adopting useful technologies to benefit its students. The district sought to further improve educational outcomes by providing a comprehensive platform for learning. Miami-Dade County Public Schools serves more than 350,000 students across 400 school facilities, which makes it one of the largest districts in the United States. It is also one of the most diverse, with students who originate from more than 100 countries. "One of the

most important things about Miami-Dade is that fifteen years from now, the rest of our country, the face of our nation, will be the face of Miami today," says Alberto M. Carvalho, Superintendent at Miami-Dade County Schools. "That is why unlocking the code of opportunity for Miami-Dade students is also finding a scalable solution for a nation in waiting."

Fully serving all those students is a constant challenge, but one that the district is addressing with its digital convergence initiative, which will give students new devices that run the Windows 8 operating system. The initiative started in February 2014 when the district brought in partner United Data Technologies to begin the first phase of the planned rollout of 150,000 HP devices to 12,000 elementary school students and 35,000 seventh-grade civics and ninth-grade world history students. Every district student will have a subscription of Microsoft Office through the Microsoft Student Advantage benefit, which extends their use of Microsoft Office from the classroom into the home. This will help increase technology familiarity in students' families.

"Today, education must not be restricted to bell-to-bell instruction," says Carvalho, referring to the school day. "Instruction must be an anytime, anywhere activity that meets students where they are and takes them to proficiency. If they have devices, they can be connected both at school and at home, which greatly expands their ability to continue learning beyond the school bell."

As part of Office 365, the district's students also can benefit from Microsoft OneDrive cloud-based storage and access to student/teacher collaboration. Students will be able to access their devices, the district's network, and its applications all with a single logon.

To ensure that learners receive the technology training that they need to use computers effectively, Miami-Dade County Schools will deploy the Microsoft IT Academy program to more than one-third of the schools in the district to obtain skills training, college and career readiness, and Microsoft certifications. "Together we're connecting the students of today to the workforce demands of tomorrow in this globalized economic landscape," says Carvalho. In addition, the Microsoft Store is providing teacher training, parent outreach, technology summer camps and afterschool programs, and user group sessions to spread technical knowledge.

"Districts often embark on a technology plan, buying devices first, not considering the digital content needs, and forgetting about professional development," says Carvalho. "This district, in association with Microsoft, is leading with human capital development. This is the right approach to achieve digital content equity for all. We are fully empowering boys and girls with the opportunity to be digitally connected and ready for the future that awaits them."

Jump-Starting Tomorrow's Economy

Miami-area leaders made the logical extension from augmenting students' technical skills to ensuring that young adults have local job opportunities and fostering an entrepreneurial environment in the

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area. To facilitate this goal, Microsoft hosted a Microsoft YouthSpark event in February 2014 for 140 regional educators, public officials, and business and nonprofit representatives. At the event, stakeholders discussed the state of youth education and connected youth with opportunities for education, employment, and entrepreneurship.

To further expand job opportunities, Miami became the site for the first US–based Microsoft Innovation Center. Considered a flagship facility, the center provides world-class resources and support for students, entrepreneurs, and startup businesses. It will maintain the latest technologies and tools to help drive job creation, increase the number and availability of highly skilled local technology specialists, and facilitate collaboration among a variety of diverse groups in the greater Miami area.

"Through the Microsoft Innovation Center, Miami has access to all the leading tools and technologies necessary to motivate our citizens to be innovative and grow our emerging technology sectors," says Gimenez. "With all the training services and engagement opportunities available, the facility will undoubtedly help further transform Miami-Dade into a twenty-first century county."

The center is hosted by Venture Hive—a hub for tech startups—at its downtown Miami location. "Public, private, and academic partnerships are key to developing the regions entrepreneurial and technology scene," says Susan Amat, Founder of Venture Hive. "Bringing Microsoft in is part of the broader goal of bringing the world to Miami." The center will be virtually connected to other Microsoft Innovation Centers and key communities in Latin America and Europe, which will support international collaboration.

"Having the first Microsoft Innovation Center in the United States located in Miami demonstrates that our technology community is not just growing—it's thriving," says Tomas Regalado, Mayor of the City of Miami. "The access we'll have to top technology and highly specialized workers will be immensely valuable in developing and sustaining our communities—both locally and worldwide."

One facet of the Microsoft Innovation Center is that it provides Miami-area entrepreneurs and startups with membership in the Microsoft BizSpark program, which includes access to software, developer tools, services, and support. The program is designed to accelerate the success of startups by connecting them to active members of the global Microsoft software community, from whom they receive mentorship, guidance, and technology resources. "As a community, we want to act as a business incubator to encourage innovation and provide jobs for tomorrow," says Commissioner Marc Sarnoff. "When we teamed up with Microsoft, we gained access to these technical resources which helps further establish Miami as a technology-centered destination."

The Future Is Bright

By taking a big-picture approach to addressing mutual issues, the Miami community is transforming into a modern model for how counties, cities, and school districts can work in tandem with the private sector and nonprofits for the benefit of all citizens. As some of their first steps toward innovation take hold, the Miami-Dade County, City of Miami, and Miami-Dade County Public Schools are poised for even greater advantages. Expanded training opportunities, a revitalized economy, and a renewed ability to reach out and lead the way toward stronger international ties are all part of a rosy future. Concludes Gimenez, "Thanks to our alliance with Microsoft, we'll be able to continue to be the gateway to Latin America and break new ground in civic innovation and technological excellence."