Having won multiple SME Accounting Software Awards, Big Red Cloud is one of Ireland's leading providers of accounting and book-keeping software for SME owners. The company's competitive edge is derived from its ability to provide its customers with a simple to use accounting platform, that not only produces a Trading, Profit & Loss Account and Balance Sheet, but makes the day-to-day process of raising invoices and calculating VAT simple – this combines with a clear low-cost pricing model.

Big Red Cloud's software is cost effective and time saving for SMEs. Recommended by partners such as the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and CPA Ireland (among others), Big Red Cloud has sold in excess of 40,000 on-premise and cloud accounting licenses since 2001, and as a result, the company has fostered a loyal customer base. They serve a wide range of customers including accountants and book-keepers, to bee keepers and farmers, with employee ranges of 2 to 50 and turnover ranges of thousands to millions.

Along with their long-established on-premise accounting solution, Big Red Cloud launched a cloud-based solution in 2012 on the Microsoft Azure Platform. In addition, the online platform's live phone and chat support features help to guide business owners every step of the way in successfully running their books.

The Challenge

After the sale of their SAP business company, Big Red Book felt they had become stale and needed a revamp. Due to this, they made the forward-thinking decision to re-develop Big Red Book for the Cloud, which is now Big Red Cloud.

Why Big Red Cloud Chose Azure

Big Red Cloud chose Azure because it meant that they could concentrate their efforts on writing the application and deploying it to a fully Platform as a Service (PaaS) environment. This meant they did not have to worry about configuring servers, updates, networking etc., as the Azure service does all of that.

The Azure platform is also natively built to run code written for the .NET Framework – their software development environment of choice. Big Red Cloud recognise that if they had gone with their own data centre, or virtual machines hosted on Amazon, the breadth of their responsibility would have been much greater – creating, configuring and deploying virtual machines, as well as subsequently keeping them up to date. As a small company, this approach would have stretched their resources.

Marc O'Dwyer, CEO, maintains that:

"By deploying to Azure, we can focus on writing a great app, and then trust the Azure platform to look after it once deployed."

O'Dwyer shares:

 "When we started using Azure, there were only a handful of services available. There was still enough to build our application, but since then, Microsoft have demonstrated their commitment to the platform by way of a significant expansion in the range and capability of the services on offer. For example, when we started, the Azure SQL database offered a maximum 10Gb capacity. Today, the maximum capacity stands at 500Gb, and new Premium level databases are available, providing unparalleled guaranteed performance levels."

New services have since been added to Azure such as Virtual Machines, Online Backup, Azure IOT Hub, Media Services and Azure Active Directory.

"Essentially, whatever type of app you want to build, Azure can provide everything required to build, deploy and scale that app," O'Dwyer explains.

"The other development is that Microsoft have greatly expanded the number of global data centres offering the Azure service. It's a fact that Microsoft now run more global data centres than either Google or Amazon."

How Did Microsoft Help?

Big Red Cloud required assistance and guidance on how to architect and develop their application. As O'Dwyer reports:

"From the outset, the Microsoft team couldn't have been more helpful. We received direct engagement from the Developer eXperience team – everything from guidance on architecture, hands on workshops to help us learn the platform, and even attending some of our early project planning meetings to help ensure that we were on the right track from the start."
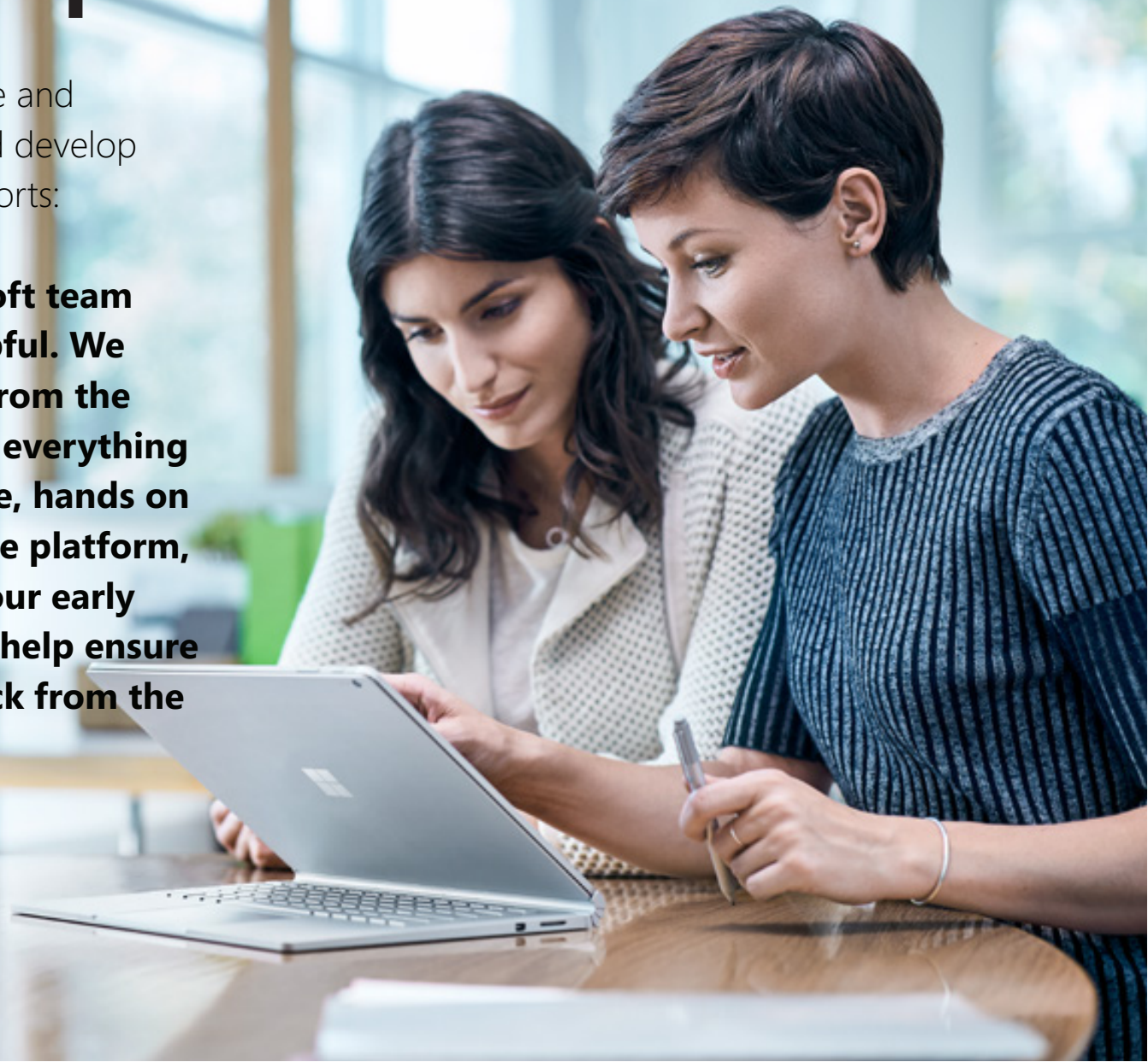
The Results

A key result of working with Azure is that Big Red Cloud can now provide high end technical services to SMEs, that up until now were only available to large corporates. Big Red Cloud also claim that working with Microsoft has instilled confidence in their end users, as they appreciate that their data is being held on the most secure cloud data centre in the world.

"By working with Azure, we can confidently market Big Red Cloud in the knowledge that our customer's data is secure; and as our customer numbers grow, Azure is unbelievably saleable, ensuring unlimited capacity."