Microsoft

Customer: Shezlong
Website: www.shezlong.com
Customer Size: 6 employees
Country: Egypt
Industry: Healthcare

Customer Profile
Shezlong is an Egyptian start-up company that offers a unique, innovative service: online psychotherapy that addresses the needs of millions of people and counters the social stigma associated with such services.

Software and Services
- Microsoft Azure
- Microsoft BizSpark Program

Open Source Software
- Linux
- Drupal
- Ruby on Rails
- MySQL

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Ground-breaking service for millions of persons with emotional and psychological problems launched from cloud

"Because we are a start-up, we needed a really good foundation from which to launch our service. BizSpark offers are compelling, while Azure is a robust, impressive platform."

Ahmed Abo El Haz, CEO, Shezlong

Shezlong, an Egypt-based, start-up company, looks to offer online psychotherapy for millions of sufferers within the country and the Middle East. It's a radical service and one that aims to address the social stigma associated with such services. To get up and running, Shezlong needed a cloud-based platform that could support its open source architecture. It turned to Azure and the Microsoft BizSpark program.

Egypt-based Shezlong offers a unique, innovative service for the Middle East. Shezlong is a derivative of the French word, *chaise lounge*: a phrase often associated with a patient lying on a psychiatrist's couch. The company has modernized this concept and brought it into the digital age with an online psychotherapy service. It will be initially offered in Egypt and, over time, throughout the Middle East. The need for the service is great.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there are approximately 1.7 billion people in the world suffering from a range of mental health conditions. This might be anything from acute anxiety and clinical depression to obsessive compulsive disorders. The WHO believes there are 23 million people suffering from these and similar conditions in Egypt alone. However, one of the factors preventing people from receiving treatments are cultural values and social stigma: they say that either these conditions do not exist, or that if people are indeed suffering, they just need the willpower to overcome their afflictions rather than seeking specialized treatment.

Microsoft Azure

Innovative online treatment

Shezlong is trying to fill this service gap by offering online treatment from qualified psychotherapists. The online nature of this service helps overcome cultural barriers and social stigma typically associated with seeking and receiving treatment. However, with an estimated 10,000 website hits per month, Shezlong needed a hosting platform that could not only provide a foundation for the service, but also accommodate its open source architecture. These were important points given that the service had been built around open source technologies. The cost-benefits of such technologies, along with scalability and high availability, were absolutely essential to the service's success.

Shezlong had built its solution on open source technologies such as Linux, Drupal, PHP, Ruby on Rails and MySQL.

Azure was hosting platform of choice

Ahmed Abo El Haz, CEO at Shezlong, says, "We have been promoting the service via online channels and via the media. It has generated a lot of interest. With 200,000 engagements we are anticipating 50,000 long-term users. Keeping costs down is essential for a start-up like ours. In doing so, we can concentrate on essential expenditure such as paying salaries.

"We needed a hosting platform that would support our open source, content framework system, while delivering performance and scalability. This is why we chose Microsoft Azure."

As a start-up company, Shezlong qualified for business-boosting support from the Microsoft BizSpark program, which provides Azure hosting at an extremely low cost in initial phases.

BizSpark is available to private tech start-ups that are less than five years old and earn less than US$1 million annually. It provides US$150 monthly credit for Azure cloud services for three years. Program participants also have the possibility to move to BizSpark Plus, which offers more features and up to US$5000 of Azure services per month for a one-year period.

Foundation for open source

Ahmed Abo El Haz adds, "It's a really good foundation from which to launch the service. BizSpark offers are compelling, while Azure is a robust, impressive platform."

The Azure platform and BizSpark have provided Shezlong with a solid base for its open-source based platform. This will not only support the business as it grows, but also help it flourish and thrive. Ahmed Abo El Haz says, "We essentially get free product usage and Microsoft support. It is a cloud-based service that helps us realize

Shezlong's full potential, while keeping costs down."

Azure provides a fully scalable, highly available platform that grows with a business' needs: automatically scaling to meet growing user demands. The BizSpark program enabled Shezlong to get its business up and running, while keeping expenses low thanks to what is, in effect, a free service during the first year after launch.

Big data and big growth

Azure's ability to accommodate open source technologies also means Shezlong can quickly create new virtual machines. This provides the scope the company needs to operate cost-effectively and grow its business.

Furthermore, Shezlong's revenue streams are based on session and private message fees. As the number of patients grows (aided by the Azure platform), big data will be collected and used to analyze trends and patterns to grow the business even further.

Ahmed Abo El Haz says about Azure, "It's a large, flexible, cloud platform that delivers security and performance. It supports our open source Linux technologies and is scalable and highly available. In short, it's a smart investment."