

# AvantiGas

Streamlining business operations across Europe.



The consumerisation of business means that for many of us, our expectations around service and delivery have changed. Precision delivery procedures are increasingly seen as a benchmark across B2B markets too. Applying these processes on a global scale is a huge undertaking that requires significant investment in an organisation's entire IT infrastructure – from billing and stock control to the website and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP).

To achieve this level of service delivery, AvantiGas, the UK arm of an international supplier of liquefied petroleum gases (LPG), worked with Six Degrees on implementing a multi-cloud platform across Microsoft Azure and our Birmingham South data centre. This platform delivers security, hosting, and voice and data services to streamline delivery operations in the UK and throughout Europe. By consolidating its IT infrastructure, this leading energy supplier has achieved a reduction in IT operating costs whilst enabling faster, more consistent and higher quality services across the UK and Europe.

## Background

AvantiGas provides a range of energy products and service solutions including off-grid LPG Bulk Gas, LPG Bottles, Aerosol Propellant, Biomass Renewables and, more recently, an on-grid Mains Gas division for business customers. AvantiGas is part of the UGI Corporation – a holding company that through its subsidiaries distributes, stores, transports and markets energy products and related services internationally.

As a top energy supplier, AvantiGas' core aim is to provide a consistent, professional and safe service to all of its business and residential customers via its network of distribution centres – two inland gas terminals and a UK-based emergency centre that delivers 24x7 maintenance, service and aftercare support. The UGI group is comprised of approximately 3,000 employees serving 580,000 customers, manages 19 million cylinders via 68,000 distribution locations and is continuously expanding through acquisitions. With bulk sales included, UGI International sold approximately 930 million gallons of LPG throughout Europe in fiscal year 2017. All services, support care and products are underpinned by the company's IT infrastructure, making it crucial that IT systems remain available 24x7, without compromise.

## About Six Degrees

We are a cloud-led managed service provider. We work as a collaborative technology partner to businesses making a digital transition.

Always placing clients at the heart of our strategy, our passionate teams combine technical expertise and deep sector specific knowledge to innovate, craft and manage the right solutions to power businesses.

The breadth and strength of our technology is our foundation. Solutions range from data and application performance management through to colocation and unified communications, all with private, public and hybrid cloud at its core.

We work collaboratively and build long-term partnerships through exceptional services that match our clients' needs. We continually innovate the right solutions to enable our clients' brilliance.



## Challenge

AvantiGas initially began its journey with Six Degrees through a complex re-deployment of critical business applications across its UK ERP system, JD Edwards, from a private cloud. Six Degrees had worked closely with the AvantiGas team in the UK to create a solution that was flexible, benefited from a consistently high quality of service, maintained fixed pricing, and helped drive AvantiGas' UK growth and objectives. Feedback from the AvantiGas UK HQ soon reached Steve Jones, Head of IT at UGI International North, who saw an opportunity to create a shared platform with common standard policies and uniform service levels by expanding Six Degrees' role across 15 European countries.

As a continuously growing company with ambitious goals, AvantiGas required a pan-European cloud infrastructure partner to transform its business operations and, critically, ensure that the technology in place integrated seamlessly – there was no room for error.

Steve Jones explains: "After seeing the work Six Degrees was doing in the UK, we decided we wanted to use the same partner across the other 15 European countries to create a hybrid methodology across Six Degrees' UK data centres and European Azure data centres through the Microsoft platform. The UK deployment had essentially worked as the proof of concept – at this point Six Degrees had our trust that it could align its resources to our current, intermediate and future plans. Six Degrees felt like a good fit and after an intensive pricing exercise it was a no-brainer – they were the technology partner we needed and wanted."

AvantiGas was looking for a true technology partner to provide advice and support to guide them through a complex IT landscape and create bespoke solutions suited to its requirements. As an acquisitive company, being able to speed up the integration process was key to enabling a quicker return on investment – a driving factor for the business's digital transformation. The scale and geographical diversity of the solution meant this would be a challenging solution deployment with a long onboarding process.

## Solution

The multi-cloud solution Six Degrees devised consisted of hybrid Cloud Platform & Data services managed across our Enterprise Cloud and Azure, Agile Workspace services delivering desktop services, Network Infrastructure services for voice and data connectivity, and Cyber Security & Compliance services mitigating the risk of cyber-attack. Within these four components, Six Degrees supplies and manages disaster recovery and backup, voice over IP, licensing, communications, migration services and interconnections between Azure and Six Degrees data centre platforms. The solution is designed to enable AvantiGas to focus on its core competencies of distributing, storing and transporting products and services rather than managing the IT.

Prior to the project, AvantiGas maintained separate deployments of SQL Servers throughout Europe. AvantiGas wanted to bring these servers into a centralised location and consolidate them, improving performance and latency whilst reducing costs. Six Degrees built an always-on availability cluster in Microsoft Azure and migrated the SQL Servers' databases into this cluster. This enabled AvantiGas to roll out a standardised configuration that eased management burden and reduced costs. Six Degrees also used Microsoft Azure network connectivity to configure disaster recovery capabilities for the new SQL Server cluster, maximising uptime and availability and ensuring the availability of services to AvantiGas and its users.

Applications are delivered to users through Citrix's Virtual Desktop (formerly XenDesktop), which provides a ubiquitous user experience and offers optimal management and control across diverse locations. Citrix Virtual Desktop can be rolled out quickly and easily to new locations, supporting AvantiGas' acquisition schedule moving forward. In addition, Six Degrees has deployed Citrix networking products including Citrix Gateway for AvantiGas. Citrix Gateway offers secure access and a convenient single sign-on to all virtual, SaaS and web apps and desktops, enabling AvantiGas employees to remain productive regardless of location.

### ADVANTAGES AND BENEFITS

#### Consolidated IT infrastructure

AvantiGas, with support from Six Degrees, has deployed a consolidated IT infrastructure that is high performing, consistent and reliable.

#### High levels of security

Data is properly stored, managed and protected in Six Degrees data centres and the Microsoft Azure platform.

#### Common technology platform

AvantiGas has common technology standards and policies, along with unified service levels to customers across Europe.

#### Predictable pricing model

A predictable pricing model enables AvantiGas to accurately forecast and control IT expenditure.

### THE CLIENT

#### Steve Jones Head of IT, UGI International North

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An integral part of the solution is the Six Degrees helpdesk. AvantiGas does not have any large IT teams in the EU, instead relying on the Six Degrees helpdesk to support the whole environment, monitor it and ensure backup and connectivity remain constant. As well as maintaining this constant support, Six Degrees implemented a monthly helpdesk meeting for AvantiGas as a way of keeping in touch and running over any existing support tickets to ensure everything remains on track and on time.

Steve Jones said: “The helpdesk support Six Degrees offers is a cut above other IT service providers. Any IT provider can deliver the technology and go through the onboarding process – that is about planning and organisation. In the end, the distinction comes down to people – it makes all the difference to my staff to know that when they have a problem, there is a familiar voice on the end of the phone who understands the related challenges and anxieties and is going to work hard to fix it quickly – Six Degrees is the concierge of IT.”

AvantiGas is a 24x7 operation so it was vital that the business would not notice or experience any interruptions throughout the onboarding phase. To achieve this, Six Degrees took the same approach that proved successful for the UK transition, whereby the new environment is built in tandem with the old. With an onboarding phase spanning the UK and 15 European countries, managing this risk was crucial. Six Degrees was totally focused on removing any issues that could possibly occur and built risk-management into the migration strategy.

Steve commented: “The success of the UK implementation created a confidence in Six Degrees – we knew that they understood the objectives AvantiGas is working to achieve and there was a great methodology between the two businesses which could be built upon”.

## Outcome

As the onboarding process continued across Europe, AvantiGas and Six Degrees successfully consolidated all IT operations and infrastructures. Building a unified platform base from where AvantiGas’ common technologies can operate has created, and continues to create, efficiencies across the business. Streamlining operations is a big step in enabling the business to achieve its goal of delivering faster, more consistent and higher quality services to its customers.

Steve said: “We operate in a highly competitive market and to remain on top we needed to speed up our delivery across Europe while reducing operation costs. This meant streamlining the delivery of 93 million bottles of gas across Europe. To achieve this goal it was essential to harmonise our IT solutions across the company to a common, unified platform. We had such great feedback from the UK team on the service that Six Degrees was providing that I travelled to their office to review how the solution was helping to drive growth and meet objectives in that region. From there it was clear that this was a solution that should be implemented across Europe.”

Steve again highlights: “Six Degrees continues to go above and beyond our service-level agreement. From the very beginning, our discussions with Six Degrees were all based around predictability, cost transparency and quality of service, and Six Degrees has delivered on every aspect of these.”

## The Future

“We are a large company and Six Degrees has managed and worked together with incumbent suppliers providing us with standardised, consistent delivery. We now have a well-organised IT infrastructure that facilitates efficient operations across our geographically diverse corporation and will be able to support any future endeavours. We are very pleased with the services that Six Degrees has provided – from the start they have been honest, understanding and transparent, and have delivered on their promises. It is refreshing to work with a provider that delivers on a true partnership model. We will be happy to continue our work together moving forward” Steve concluded.

3,000  
employees

580,000  
customers

19 million  
cylinders

68,000  
distribution locations

15  
European countries

### OUR SOLUTIONS



#### Cloud Platform & Data

Modernise your data centre and secure your hybrid cloud future.



#### Cyber Security & Compliance

Enhance your cyber security posture and safeguard your organisation.



#### Agile Workspace

Communicate, collaborate and work efficiently, anywhere.



#### Network Infrastructure

Achieve a step change in your connectivity and your digital transformation journeys.