

# Media giant creates cost-effective, self-service classifieds booking and billing system in the cloud with Google App Engine

# # News Limited

## At a Glance

#### What they wanted to do

- Accelerate time-to-market
- Enhance Customer convenience and control over content
- Reduce overhead for booking and billing classifieds
- Improve margins in highly competitive market
- · Ramp up development and iterate quickly
- Avoid the high costs of in-house servers and multiple layers of approvals

#### What they did

- Developed an online classifieds business using Google's Cloud Platform suite of products
- Adopted a lean and ultra-agile philosophy: Acceptable Release Candidate (ARC)
- Worked toward streamlining back-end billing processes through integration with Google Apps

# What they accomplished

- Built and deployed the first trial to customers in just 3 weeks
- Published five prototypes for Customer testing within two to three months
- Combined best features of each into live site: www.traderoo.com.au
- Improved Customer satisfaction and convenience, as well as ad accuracy
- Continued to iterate quickly and empower individuals to make smart decisions
- Became a nimble startup within a large corporation
- Reduced costs to the point that the project does not have to be a line item in the budget

# Organisation

News Limited is one of Australia's largest media companies, spanning newspapers, magazines, online, and subscription TV. News Limited publishes over 140 online and printed newspapers in major Australian cities including Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, and Perth, as well as in suburban areas.

# Challenge

Like many publishing organisations, News Limited relies on classified ads from consumers, local businesses as well as large enterprises as a source of income.

Traditionally, booking and billing classifieds was manual and time-consuming. A mix of either field sales teams, call centre agents, or basic online tools. Ads that are not booked online involved manually intensive processes and the potential rose for inadvertent errors such as typos or omissions.

Seeking to be as customer focused and efficient as possible, News Limited wanted Customers to be able to serve themselves by placing ads online. For Customers, the classifieds booking system needed to be easy to use, give them more control over their ad content, and allow them to publish ads online immediately. For News Limited, the goals included fast time to market, lower costs, and less overhead in the form of call centre time and manual data entry.

"The margins in classified advertising are razor thin," says Joshua Lowcock, head of commercial platforms & products for News Limited. "Our team and 3wks, our Google Cloud Platform development partner, became a startup within a large organisation chartered with creating an innovative classifieds booking and billing solution that we could get to market quickly, at a low cost, with rapid adoption rates."

"Google App Engine has enabled us to move dynamically and quickly in a huge, fast-paced, and very competitive market. Moreover, we've been able deliver classifieds products to customers at a lower cost."

—Joshua Lowcock, head of commercial platforms & products,
News Limited

## Solution

To move as quickly as possible Joshua recognised that an old-style development approach would never suffice. He needed a platform-as-a-service (PaaS) option, because purchasing servers, hiring solutions architects, configuring hosting environments, and structuring databases would only create heavy, slow, and costly overhead up-front and long-term.

Instead, he and his team of roughly 30 experts turned to the Google App Engine, a solution from Google that lets users run web applications on Google's cloud infrastructure. Joshua saw that an App Engine application

# About the Google App Engine

Google App Engine allows businesses to build and host web apps on the same infrastructure that powers Google's applications. It offers fast development and deployment, effortless scalability and simple administration, with no need to worry about hardware, patches or backups.

For more information visit http://cloud.google.com/appengine

"With the cloud and Google App Engine, performance becomes a given, so we can focus on our Customers more than anything else. Google App Engine has put us light years ahead of where I thought we'd ever be."

—Joshua Lowcock, head of commercial platforms & products, News Limited

would be easy to build, easy to maintain, and simple to scale as the user base and data storage needs grew.

Within just two to three months, the team on the classifieds project had generated five consumer prototypes for live testing. The best elements from each were ultimately consolidated into a live, production booking and billing system at www.traderoo.com.au, accessible across both mobile and desktop platforms. Online ads are free. Print ads are optional and require a small fee, but complement online ads by extending the advertiser's reach.

Joshua notes that traderoo will never be considered final. His philosophy reaches beyond "minimum viable product" (MVP). Instead, he uses the term "acceptable release candidate," or ARC. This freeing philosophy allows individuals to propose and release updates upon a single nod of the team in a weekly meeting. Features can be more easily measured against customer benefits, prioritised and fixed, and iterations occur with speed and ease. As a result of ARC, Joshua notes that his team is more agile than most "agile" development groups, and far faster and more productive.

"If you are proud of the software you've released, then you've been at it too long," says Joshua. "No product is ever finished, because you always iterate. The days of polished, beautiful, shrink-wrapped software are over. With Google App Engine, we empower smart people to make smart decisions and get new features to market quickly."

# **Results**

A commercial technologist with an affinity for the power of the cloud, Joshua was impressed with Google's continuous innovation and security, as well as its scalability and performance. His decision proved spot on. The Google App Engine has accelerated the speed of innovation and the level of productivity, while freeing the team to work as a startup, eliminating layers of bureaucracy and overhead.

As a next step, Joshua is looking to integrate other Google solutions such as Google Apps – already in use by 400 News Limited employees – to streamline back-end administrative processes for running Google Analytics Premium accounts.

"Innovation doesn't happen when IT staff are focused on keeping the lights on," says Joshua. "Google App Engine has enabled us to move dynamically and quickly in a huge, fast-paced, and very competitive market. Moreover, we've been able to make our classifieds business more profitable."

There are no onsite servers or expensive licensing fees involved. Joshua notes that the costs are so low for Google App Engine that the finance team expressed surprise at just how cost effective the solution was.

"We saved time and money on every aspect of build." says Joshua. "Our Business Intelligence platform was built and deployed in a day using Google's Big Query and the Prediction API is at the core of our trust & safety features, helping to protect our customers. We didn't even have to worry about where to store data, we used the Google Cloud Platform for that too."

For Joshua, the most satisfying benefit is better usability for advertisers. Not only are response times much faster, but also Customers like the new solution. "We've fundamentally changed the way consumers engage with us by creating a more usable experience and superb responsiveness," says Joshua. "With the cloud and Google App Engine, performance becomes a given, so we can focus on our Customers more than anything else. Google App Engine has put us light years ahead of where I thought we'd ever be."

