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Avid cyclist Neil Baker started ezRider (https://ezrider.bike) in 2012. Neil is a programmer who works professionally in the Electrical Engineering industry with experience in developing Windows desktop database applications. As someone who is always keen to learn new things and try out new technology, he wanted to expand his skills by doing something current and mainstream, but without the pressure of doing it for business with money on the line. So he paired his love of bike riding with his programming knowledge to a build a site that connects riders with others in their local area. Recently, Neil made some upgrades to his site, taking his site into the cloud with Everleap. We talked with Neil to learn a little more about his hobby project and his journey towards cloud hosting.

Everleap: Thanks for talking with us Neil. First off, let's chat a little bit about your site and how it got started.

Neil Baker: Melbourne Australia's Beach Road is one of the busiest roads in the world for weekend warrior road bike riding. It is estimated that there are up to 30,000 riders on the road on a good weekend. Around five years ago, I became one of them. These riders consist of single riders as well as small, medium and large groups. In my group, around four to ten of us would ride regularly on Saturdays and Sundays. The acronym MAMIL (middle-

ezRider.🚲

Customers
Bike riders in Australia, New Zealand and the U.S.

Business challenge
Finding a Microsoft Azure based hosting solution affordable enough for a start-up, hobby site.

Solution used
Single site plan

aged man in lycra) could not be more accurate for us. Organizing our group meant "are you going yes or no?" phone calls and mass SMS about the planned ride and where to meet. This worked well, but we never knew who was going to turn up - too hot, too cold, too wet, too windy, too hungover, can't be bothered. So people were at times left alone at the meeting spot or we left without someone.

The need for an IT solution became obvious to me. We needed a basic "who's in", "who's out", "who's a maybe" thing that everyone could have access to. So I launched the ezrider.mobi website – the first version of my site. After just a few days, people were coming on board and showing interest. A little while down the

> "I knew the next version of this website—done better—would be in the cloud." - Neil Baker, ezRider

track and our situation had changed to some real group consistency - the take up rate was very good and it was used exactly as I had hoped.

What makes your site unique?

There is nothing really new about this site. There are lots of ways that you can find other local rides easily online. One thing that is different though is that old data just falls off, so that you don't come across information that is outdated. My site also caters to the middle-aged person. Someone who is not on social media, who is not good on computers. My site is an alternative for those who have not adopted social—it appeals to them in its simplicity and ease of use.

Tell us a little more about the site in its early stages.

As a Windows programmer, I was familiar with Visual Studio and the transition to ASP.NET was easy. The early website was on Windows hosting, created with ASP.NET and jQuery Mobile with a Microsoft Access database. This was as basic as it needed to be to get everyone organized. I had to manually create each user myself. The

friends. But it became clear to me this idea could grow if done better.

You started thinking cloud, right?

Between the launch of ezRider.mobi and the launch of ezRider.bike, a new term – "the cloud" - crept into the lexicon. It was popping up everywhere. As it became pervasive, I needed to know more and I knew the next version of this website done better would be in the cloud.

I have owned various versions of Visual Studio for desktop programming. Then Microsoft released VS2013 at a special price. Of course I purchased it. VS now had something called Azure built right into it. At the time, I had never heard of it. As it turns out, Azure is Microsoft's cloud. Microsoft allows developers to sign up and get access to many of their cloud features for free or low cost.

This, to the technically inquisitive, became a cloud learning factory. Before this, I had heard of one click web deploy (the ability to press one button in VS, publish the

> "I considered staying with Microsoft, but what I really wanted was a high value, clearly priced Azure-like provider."

whole point of the website was that it be easy and it was. I even heard some riders describe it as addictive, as they would always look at it.

I had only sent two SMS messages about the original website and was already being asked by many people if I could set their groups up, which I did. I am not sure when I wrote the original website that I had "world wide bike ride organization domination" in my mind – I just hoped nice people would discover the site and share it with their

web site and update changes to the database in a single action) and had even posted a job on oDesk issuing the challenge to a developer to implement this one click deploy. As it turns out, this could not be done with the traditional web hosting I was using. I was disappointed. The old way is FTP this and that while running scripts on the database. It takes time and has the potential for failure. The Azure option made this task as easy as can be imagined.

So it was time for a change for your site, correct?

Once I understood the Azure system, I embraced it and decided the future ezRider.bike would exist on this platform. The new website uses Entity Framework Migrations for the database. This is true one click web deploy and for me became a future requirement. I had some other requirements for the site. It must be mobile friendly and use Bootstrap. I also wanted the comments to be updating live using webAPI and to use MSSQL and stay within the Microsoft environment.

At this point, I became wrapped up in the technology and the desire for a good technical solution. I went on and I wrote the site. I focused on the database and making sure the information in there is live. What I had experienced on other sites was they are full of entries that could be a year old. My intention was to give the user strong search capabilities that discard old information. The site is strong on info and OK on beauty.

So you were cloud ready. What happened next?

As this was a side programming project, I had decided the site was good enough and usable. Now I needed to host it for real on Azure. Although I never really expected this site to have a high volume of users, you quietly hope it does. At this point I started to think about scaling - in other words what happens when all these weekend riders start coming online on Friday night. Does it just go slower? Does it stop? But no worries, Azure can just scale up more processors.

What I realized at this point, however, was it was a challenge to understand the Microsoft scaling pricing structure. While this would be easy for an existing site, for what is a start up site it was clear the costs would be high. I wanted to stay with Azure - I did not want to give up the simplicity and ease of use. I then started looking at the pricing structure for the Azure SQL. Same thing with the scaling. I also had decided the site was going to have SSL even though the info is public. This also led

to increased fees on Microsoft Azure. The costs started to rack up and I was uncertain about what they would end up being. Even after all this, I still considered staying with Microsoft. But what I really wanted was a high value, clearly priced Azure-like provider.

And then you found us.

I cannot remember how I came across Everleap, but what I do remember is that I stored your site in my favourites well before I launched and did not forget it. I was a bit skeptical, but I set about understanding the Everleap offer and I realized I got a lot for my money. I sent you a message asking some technical questions. I received a response within two days and to my surprise you had included instructions on how to do what I was asking. I took advantage of your 30 day free trial one week later. I got the website and database up and running using one click deploy in less than an hour. It was very easy and I was really impressed.

Not long after I came to the conclusion that, for my needs, I could not tell the difference between Everleap and Microsoft. It's amazing what you can do with Microsoft technology and I'm amazed at how well Everleap integrates everything. I really can't see why someone with needs similar to mine would do it another way. Your offer for a kick off site is hard not to consider and you get a lot of value.

How do you feel you most benefit from our platform?

I can grow on your hardware and can accommodate increased demand when the traffic ramps up on the weekend. I now have the ability to upscale easily if the site grows and other mates come on board. I can deploy with one click and updates are seamless. I press a button and it all goes. The MSSQL database capacity is far larger than other offerings. I have stable pricing. I have SSL security. I have included emails. I can test on Azure to my heart's content and it's so nice to know that it will deploy on Everleap without issue. Once I realized this

value while still under your free trial offer, I transferred the new domain over to you. Then I ran Google Adwords in the US and within one day I had real users. This was quite a satisfying moment.

Every country in the world is programmed into the site so I envision in the future turning on the site for the whole world. For now, the site is just about organizing people, but I want to do what I can to make it better and to bring in more current web technology. Perhaps I will develop some apps. I have so many ideas for the things I can add and for ways to make the site more unique. I have no revenue streams right now, but I could look at perhaps advertising and other strategies to bring in enough to pay for costs and services to keep the site running.

I must say that your next level up of service, the Multi-site plan, is attractive and such a reasonable offer. The cost per site comes down significantly and you get a higher level of service than what you pay for. Something I will consider for the future as I have ideas for developing other similar sites. Everleap is truly economical and high value hosting.

To learn more about ezRider or to sign-up to start your own group, go to https://ezrider.bike/.■

Everleap is modern hosting for today's developer. Built by the team at DiscountASP.NET on top of Microsoft Windows Azure Pack, Everleap brings together the reliability and scalability of the big cloud hosting providers with the predictable pricing, bundled services, and ease of traditional web hosting.

More information at Everleap.com