Illinois State University Increases Availability and Agility with ERPA Partnership and Move to the Cloud

Overview

As Illinois' first public university, Illinois State University (ISU) has a storied history of excellence, beginning with its founding as a training school for teachers in 1857. In the 150-plus years since then, the University has evolved into a nationally recognized public university enrolling more than 20,000 students in a wide range of programs at the bachelor, master, and doctoral levels.

Challenges

Todd Smoak leads the Technology Solutions group at ISU; Technology Solutions is the central IT organization for the University. ISU first implemented PeopleSoft HCM on-premises in 2011, but as the University's business usage grew, the Technology Solutions team found it difficult to stay current with patching and new functionalities. In 2014, when the University decided to add PeopleSoft Campus Solutions and migrate off its legacy mainframe environment, Smoak's team knew it needed help, and turned to a managed services provider for assistance.

Unfortunately, ISU's first engagement with a managed services provider was not without its challenges. Struggles with performance during peak workloads, support times, operational issues, outages, and more were -- as Smoak described it – "exhausting", and within approximately two years, ISU issued an RFP to find a new managed services partner.

Solutions

After a thorough evaluation process, Illinois State selected ERPA as its new managed services partner for PeopleSoft Campus Solutions and HCM.

The ERPA team quickly got to work designing a solution to meet ISU's rigorous requirements, which included robust capacity for integration brokers and synchronous messages, the ability to accommodate more than 7,500 concurrent users during peak usage periods, data warehousing needs, and a disaster recovery solution that met stringent RTOs and RPOs, given ISU's physical location in a tornado-prone region of the United States.

ERPA determined that Amazon Web Services (AWS) would be an ideal fit for ISU's infrastructure. With AWS' network backbone and regional facility diversification, ISU was assured that its infrastructure would scale to meet high-demand periods like course registration and confident that it was protected in the event of a natural disaster -- or otherwise -- through active-active environments established in two disparate AWS availability zones.

And even better for ISU, ERPA offered managed services on top of its managed hosting, ultimately acting as a one-stop shop for ISU, who could now turn to ERPA for everything from incident management to application management to PUM updates to database administration.

"We've got someone [ERPA] who we consider a true partner with us," said Smoak.

Outcomes

Starting with implementation, the process couldn't have been smoother, according to Smoak.

"We transitioned our new production environments over a weekend without a hitch. It probably took longer to migrate the DNS entries nationwide than it did for our admins to actually log in to the new migrated environments. Then we just spent the rest of the weekend testing, confirming, making sure everything was right."

In its first test of the ERPA-designed solution and services and AWS infrastructure – 3,000-plus concurrent users registering for spring semester – Smoak was relieved there were no crashes and no interruption of service. "It's a big weight off our shoulders," he said.

And while cost-savings wasn't necessarily a goal of the project, Smoak has seen a nearly 30% reduction in TCO since moving to ERPA.

The overall result for ISU? "A brighter future," says Smoak.

"We've got someone [ERPA] who we consider a true partner with us. We've been able to meet the demands of our users, keep our environments patched and current. You can see we're at the latest PUM of everything, and we're constantly deploying those. And because of that, and it's been so smooth, it's allowed our internal PeopleSoft teamto focus on helping our customers get the best use out of the PeopleSoft products we own," said Smoak.

Watch Todd Smoak discuss the ISU/ERPA partnership in this recent webinar
Managing PeopleSoft Applications on AWS

About ERPA

Founded in 1999, ERPA is a market leader in PeopleSoft managed services and managed projects. ERPA's 500-plus consultants and technologists enable organizations to address their most complex operational challenges, including mitigating recruitment and retention challenges, maximizing their technology investment, and developing and executing future technology roadmaps. ERPA maintains regional headquarters across the United States, including in Dublin, Ohio; Tampa, Florida; and Dallas, Texas.