

The logo for 'risual' is displayed in white. The word 'risual' is in a lowercase, sans-serif font. Above the 'i' and 's' are several small white dots of varying sizes, suggesting a data visualization or a stylized 'i'.

Marston's take on a journey to improve accuracy and forecasting with Microsoft Azure Machine Learning.

The customer profile

Website:

<http://www.marstons.co.uk/>

Number of Employees:

Approximately 14,000

Region:

UK

Industry:

Retail

Profile:

"The local pub has always been at the heart of British community, it's where we gather to socialise, celebrate, commiserate, relax, reflect, regroup, or simply enjoy a cold beer at the end of a long day. To us, that's important, and always will be. We've been running pubs and brewing beer in one form or another for over 180 years. Now we've got 14,000 people working for us and many more in partnership with us, and they all share our passion!"



The problem

Marston's currently has over 1100 managed pubs placed up and down the UK. Marston's understand how important leisure time is and work really hard to give people the best environment to spend it in, a great range of food and drinks and all at competitive prices. Working in the retail industry can be very competitive with a constant high demand for something new, something bigger and something better. For Marston's to remain competitive it's really important to control costs and one of the biggest costs is staff. Marston's already had controls in place throughout the organisation which were there to help manage cost expenditure – they were searching for a solution that enabled the organisation to create a more tailored weekly rota sheet, which would also allow for each Marston's pub to control how many people need to be working that week (ensuring that the costs being spent were more accurate, managed and controlled).

Marston's was already aware that to achieve much more control with its spending they needed to ensure each pub manager is able to supply accurate weekly forecast. Marston's needed the relevant information prior to each week to create a controlled weekly rota for its staff – the organisation wanted to ensure the pubs had the right staff to customers ratio.

"The first thing we needed to do to control our costs is to improve our forecasting and our accuracy. We needed every pub manager to ensure they were providing the most accurate sales forecast for the upcoming week – they do this based on occasions, weather forecast, sporting, seasonal elements and more."

Paul Hume, Head of Technology Development at Marston's PLC

The solution

Marston's already had a set technology strategy plan in place across the organisation which is wrapped around the Microsoft stack. Marston's were in a position where they needed the project to begin fast and finish seamlessly and quickly. The organisation considered various solutions from other partners, but Marston's knew what they wanted and how they would achieve it they just needed the support from a business who would be able to advise and match its expectations along the way.

Due to a pre-existing relationship and with risual being located locally, Marston's began working with risual to use their expertise and knowledge with Machine Learning. Marston's approached risual already with a high understanding of the Microsoft stack, they knew what they wanted, but needed a highly skilled professional team who can complete the project.

"What we've learnt, particularly with data projects, is if there is a clear sense of what the business is trying to achieve and why they are trying to achieve it, then our engagement needn't be overly complex, particularly in the early stages. It's important to take a help-orientated approach which is exactly what we took with Marstons."

James Connolly, Account Director at risual Ltd

"What really stood out for us when we were discussing our partnership and the project plan was that risual as a whole didn't seem to come across as a company who were out there just to make money, it seemed so much more genuine than that – a company who had a passion and genuinely wanted to help us."

Paul Hume, Head of Technology Development at Marston's PLC

The benefits

Marston's and risual worked together to integrate Microsoft's Azure Machine Learning into Marston's current environment, allowing them to gain data from start to finish. Marston's now have the capabilities to begin generating more accurate and tailored rotas for each pub across the UK.

Currently Marston's is still in its early days with the project so have not yet seen the benefits from the Azure Machine Learning implementation. Expected benefits are as follows:

- **Accuracy** – Azure Machine Learning will allow Marston's to gather more accurate sales forecasts and at varying intervals. Currently, forecasting is produced daily which is wonderful, but to provide better and more impactful data predictions, Marston's is working towards generating hourly forecasts.
- **Efficiency** – Azure Machine learning will be able to provide quick and accurate data at the touch of a button, helping to save costs, produce accurate and reliable decisions and free up pub management to spend time front of house delivering fantastic experiences to their customers.
- **Trends** – Azure Machine Learning can allow Marston's to view insight they usually wouldn't see from pubs, the data provided will allow trends to be identified and used to support the staffing of the pubs.
- **ROI** – All areas in Marston's is generating forecasting including, the operations team, operation managers, finance team, information team and more. Marston's has embarked on the Azure Machine Learning journey to begin immediate cost savings and see an ROI in the short and long term.

Marston's upcoming plan over the next six months is to integrate automated forecasting into existing systems.

"We've all seen the pressure UK pubs are under to not just stay open but remain competitive against the plethora of choice that consumers have with their disposable income. With inflation, pressure on wages and the growth of in-the-home technology, Marston's have had to think of ways to optimise how their pubs are ran so that any money saved can be re-invested, making the pub a more attractive place to visit. The Azure Machine Learning data project we have partnered with them on aims to deliver exactly this. It's been brilliant working with Marston's to deliver exciting improvements in how they run their business and the continuing possibilities that opens up."

James Connolly, Account Director at risual Ltd

Please note that this case study will be updated over the next year to provide you with updates of the benefits and ROI Marston's have seen.



www.risual.com



enquiries@risual.com



0300 303 2044