Break the Speed Barrier: Take Your Data for a Test Drive with an SAP HANA Evaluation

Companies that run SAP systems or those considering an implementation are likely aware that the roadmap for nearly every SAP product and solution involves SAP HANA in some capacity. As the default, in-memory database beneath every new analytic and transactional system of record — including the next-generation SAP S/4HANA business suite — there is no doubt that SAP HANA is here to stay. But while SAP customers are, for the most part, confident that their future will include SAP HANA, there are still some aspects organizations need to consider before an SAP HANA deployment becomes a reality.

In addition to sizing and cost considerations, customers must overcome uncertainty about whether putting an SAP application on SAP HANA will return the same results that they may have experienced in a demo environment. After all, the stakes are raised when it’s their data that will be migrated over. Up until now, companies moving to SAP HANA have had to make educated guesses as to what their requirements would be and plan for countless possible scenarios. Even with the tangible benefits that their peers have experienced, there can still be some pre-migration anxiety. It’s like buying a car without being able to test-drive it; you could ask other people who have driven the car how it handles and you could read reviews, but at some point, you would have to make a serious commitment without ever getting behind the wheel.

A collaboration between SAP and Amazon Web Services (AWS) removes this uncertainty by providing customers the opportunity to give SAP HANA a test-drive by provisioning SAP HANA on AWS servers on an hourly basis via the SAP Rapid Migration Test program with AWS, also known as the Fast Amazon SAP Transformation (FAST). The purpose of FAST is to reverse how customers execute the process of going through an upgrade or conversion by qualifying their risks and concerns, and by removing the barriers to entry before the customer has to make a commitment.

Rapid Test Migration Made Simple

An important design principle and value proposition of FAST is simplicity; a technically equipped customer should be able to provision an SAP application without outside assistance. As of May 2017, SAP has released a cloud-optimized database migration option (DMO) as part of the new Software Update Manager (SUM) tool. A customer team for an SAP HANA migration can now kick off a test migration inside an existing production environment without modifying the source system, and export the system content while also applying enhancement packages and other conversions into a set of flat files that can be transferred to AWS. With little more than a single click, the team can provision and build an SAP HANA server with the upgraded application code and execute the import. The net result is an upgraded SAP application in the cloud. Because the cloud-optimized version of DMO separates the export and the import, it eliminates the need for proximity between source and destination files in the data center, so customers do not need an on-site SAP HANA box to run the test migration. This leads to a previously unachievable speed, cost reduction, and simplicity as well as the ability to run the test migration in house.

From a cost standpoint alone, this removes what to date has been a barrier to entry for some companies.
The software required to set up this testing environment is included in standard SAP licensing, while the AWS fee essentially covers the cost of the infrastructure for the duration of the trial. Budget requests that would have otherwise had to be submitted despite uncertain sizing requirements, hardware decisions, and system integrator selection all go by the wayside until a customer decides to move forward from an evaluation standpoint. The removal of this cost barrier is the first of many dominoes to fall. By stripping this away, customers can easily determine their sizing requirements and see actual results using their own data. The previous unknowns are now known, helping customers make their decisions about SAP HANA with confidence.

From Test to Production

For the customer that provisions their material requirements planning (MRP) application on SAP HANA using AWS, and discovers that they can reduce their MRP run from four hours to 30 seconds, the question then becomes how to leverage this evaluation to justify a full migration project. An important point here is that for the customer that goes through this evaluation phase, the SUM tooling remains the same for a production migration; when the AWS server is shut down, any code remediations made during the evaluation, or any pending modifications, are built into the actual production migration.

An evaluation, then, is the simplified first step in a full-fledged journey to running mission-critical processes on SAP HANA through subsequent migration and transformation phases. With the evaluation in the rearview window, a customer that has qualified the risk and uncertainty — knows the code works, knows the tangible benefits, and has a working execution runbook — can continue to deploy and reap the agility and flexibility benefits at the reduced TCO of AWS, or opt for an alternative deployment scenario. The customer can then move forward without any of the uncertainty that has caused some companies to hesitate before an SAP HANA migration.

Unlock Your Potential

A common misconception that SAP and AWS have heard from potential customers is that this is not a new program. Yes, customers have had the option for several years now to trial SAP software on AWS on an hourly basis, and a cloud application library exists for that very purpose. The key difference is that FAST uses the customer’s own data. Rather than mimic a demo environment, customers put their unique and highly customized mission-critical SAP solution into the latest version of SAP HANA and have the same experience as if they were actually deploying the system into production.

From the customer perspective, this is the key value proposition that unlocks a tremendous amount of potential. Being able to see the company’s actual MRP run shrink from four hours to 30 seconds, or to see the month-end close jobs go from hours to minutes, is generally more effective than a team of sales and marketing professionals presenting hypothetical benefits. By taking away the guesswork and uncertainty of a traditional SAP HANA migration at a fraction of the cost, and providing sizing requirements and a defined value, FAST addresses and removes the barriers that have until now prevented many customers from making the inevitable move to running smarter and faster on SAP HANA. For more information, visit www.aws.amazon.com/sap.