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Case Study

SYNAGRO
YOUR PARTNER FOR A CLEANER, GREENER WORLD

Synagro charts a sustainable path toward a greener world

Composting leader harnesses the power of data using Microsoft Sustainability Manager to report on and help eliminate carbon emissions

Do what matters

Business situation: Where does it all go?

You've probably heard some variation of the phrase, "It's a dirty job, but someone has to do it."

When you run water down your sink or flush your toilet, it travels to a wastewater treatment facility where chemical and technological processes separate the water from the solids. If these organic by-products (also known as biosolids) went straight to a landfill, they'd produce massive amounts of harmful greenhouse gas emissions. Composting them, on the other hand, helps mitigate emissions and puts the waste to positive use. That's the role Synagro plays, and as North America's largest recycler of organic by-products, the company serves more than 800 municipalities across the US.

Leaders at the company are the first to tell you that Synagro's work isn't always glamorous. Is it important, however? Absolutely.

"What matters to Synagro is being a trusted adviser to our municipal customers and helping them implement green, sustainable solutions for dealing with their biosolids; solutions that are rigorous from both a regulatory and environmental perspective," explains Matt Robertson, Synagro's chief commercial officer. "At the end of the day, we're helping communities keep their water clean."

To help better serve its municipal customers, Synagro employees needed a more detailed understanding of the company's own carbon emissions along the operations chain. Previously, emissions data was collected annually from various disparate systems into an Excel document to create a report for the company's sustainability group, which tracks Synagro's environmental, social and governance (ESG) goals. It was a manual, time-consuming process.

In searching for an automated solution that could ingest large amounts of data from multiple sources and perform complex modeling of this data on a regular basis, company leadership turned to the Microsoft Sustainability Manager (MSM) and asked Avanade to help them unlock its full value.

Company Name: Synagro

Country: US-South

Industry: Natural Resources, Utilities

Company Size: 875 employees

Solution: Avanade Advisory, Data Platform Modernization, Microsoft Azure Platform Services

Solution: Painting a comprehensive picture of sustainability

MSM is part of the Microsoft Sustainability Cloud solution, powered by Microsoft Azure, which provides sustainability management by unifying data sources and automating manual processes. It enables organizations to both record and report on emissions more efficiently, and to use that data to identify ways to eliminate them.

Our relationship with Synagro began with a series of workshops conducted by Avanade Advisory to understand the company's needs and shape its journey through collaboration. "The key goal of Avanade Advisory is to meet our clients where they are," explains Angela Williams, senior director at Avanade. "We used a design-thinking approach to understand Synagro's vision for the future and then mapped those goals to the solution, rather than leading with the technology."

The Avanade team built a proof of concept in six weeks, bringing together multiple data sources in real time – from the quantities of biosolids that are processed to the electricity usage and fuel usage at both composting facilities and during transportation – to create a comprehensive picture of Synagro's total carbon footprint.

"There's an expectation right now that companies understand their own carbon footprint and take action to improve it. We have that expectation of ourselves, too, because it's just the right thing to do."

– Matt Robertson
Chief Commercial Officer, Synagro

"We knew that when we created the pipelines of data, we'd open up a new world of possibilities for analysis. But until you actually see that in practice, it can be hard to visualize. We're really starting to see those possibilities clearly now."

– Tarak Shah
Director of Application Development, Synagro

Results: Protecting people and their communities

With MSM in place, Synagro has a new starting point on its journey to increase efficiencies and lower carbon emissions while helping its customers do the same.

"Without a baseline, you don't know where to look for efficiencies," says Robertson. "Now, it's much easier to track because we can pull this data monthly rather than annually. That's a huge deal for both our people and our business."

As the company scales up the MSM solution, employees can begin using the data more broadly. "We spend a lot of time focusing on the 'E' in ESG," says Robertson. "That's obviously important, but we're also interested in how we can improve the 'S' as well – the social aspect. We want to explore how the data can help improve the health and safety of our employees and the people living in the communities we serve."

With sustainability at the heart of our own business, Avanade is proud to be on this journey with Synagro – a sentiment Robertson echoes.

"It's been great partnering with Avanade," he says. "Could we have done it on our own? Maybe, but we would lack that insight and professionalism that you get by working with a company that does this for a living. Avanade has helped us avoid those delays and accelerate our process."

Together, we're taking a dirty job and making it cleaner.

About Synagro

Founded in 1986, Synagro Technologies, Inc. works to turn waste into worth by helping more than 1,000 municipal, industrial water and wastewater facilities, and agricultural partners in North America move toward safer, cleaner and more environmentally beneficial practices. For some, it's simply cleaning the water supply. For others, it's much more – we partner with them to process their waste for compost or energy pellets, creating healthy soil and sequestering carbon in the process. As the largest recycler of organic by-products in North America, we're trusted because we remove risks while keeping the logistics clean. Because we have the most experienced team in the industry, we can offer tailored solutions that ensure no waste goes to waste. Much of our work isn't pretty. But it's a greener world emerging from a cleaner one – worth coming from waste – and we think that's pretty beautiful. Visit www.synagro.com to learn more.

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About Avanade
Avanade is the leading provider of innovative digital, cloud and advisory services, industry solutions and design-led experiences across the Microsoft ecosystem. Every day, our 60,000 professionals in 26 countries make a genuine human impact for our clients, their employees and their customers. Avanade was founded in 2000 by Accenture LLP and Microsoft Corporation. Learn more at www.avanade.com.

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