



"Our reliability has been much improved, our response time is great, and our customers notice!"

XWord Info (xwordinfo.com) is a comprehensive, online record of the daily crossword puzzles from the New York Times dating back to 1959. It is the most accurate source of puzzle data from the publication, updated as soon as each new puzzle is available on the web. We talked recently with site founder and crossword junkie Jim Horne to learn a little more about his site and his set-up.

Everleap: Thanks for talking with us Jim. How did you get into crossword puzzles and what's the background of the site?

Jim Horne: I used to write about crosswords for the New York Times and I wanted a way to collect and analyze statistical information about the crosswords themselves. That evolved into what XWord Info is today, a comprehensive record of New York Times crosswords. It's more than just solutions to puzzles - the data is cross-analyzed in dozens of different ways. New York Times crossword editor Will Shortz is a regular reader.

What kind of technology powers the site?

XWord Info is built almost entirely on Microsoft technology. It is an ASP.NET 4.5 application running on the IIS 8.5 Windows web server. LINQ is used to manage the data stored in SQL Server 2014. Software development is done on Visual Studio 2013 and now the new VS 2015 as well. Server-side code is written in C#. Some client-side JavaScript relies on jQuery and a few of its associated libraries. All pages declare the HTML 5 doctype. So even though it may be a hobby site, it's still relatively complex.

XWORD INFO

Business challenge

Optimizing performance for a large, complex site at an affordable price.

Solution used

Multi-Site plan.

"I looked at Azure, but it was more money than I wanted to spend. I also considered dedicated hosting, but again, the cost was too high. I realized that what Everleap does is not only better than both of these options, but cheaper." - Jim Horne, XWord Info

What prompted the decision to move to cloud hosting?

The complexity of the site and the large amount of data being analyzed made for a hosting challenge. As

careful as I have been to optimize performance along the way, the site is huge and some of the SQL queries can be complex. If screen scrapers or search engines come along and try to index every page, they will hit hundreds of thousands of them, some quite large.

We needed a hosting solution that could scale while still keeping prices under control. When Everleap came along, we decided to give it a try. We are currently running two load balanced web servers.

So how have things been since you made the switch? How do you benefit from the Everleap platform?

So far, it's been great. Our reliability has been much improved, our response time is great, and our customers notice! The multi-site plan gives us most of what we need right out of the box, including large enough SQL databases to run our site. We know that if we suddenly get even more popular, we can scale up even more with Power Packs or stand-alone servers.

I also like that you are quick to jump on and deploy the latest Microsoft technology. As a former Microsoft employee, I'm always curious to try their new technology. My site acts as a testing ground so I need a provider that does a great job of hosting the latest Microsoft technology stack. I'm looking forward to using ASP.NET 5.0 as soon as it's available.

How has your customer service experience been?

Customer service has been outstanding. Here's an example that comes to mind. I was an early customer so I wrote in asking why there didn't seem to be a site recycle option. The response was that it wasn't available but you were thinking of adding it. The surprise came a few weeks later when, after it was added, you remembered to send me an email notifying me. Nice.

What's next for XWord Info, and how does Everleap fit in?

I will definitely keep the site going as a resource for crossword constructors and enthusiasts. What I'm most proud about is the historical aspect of the site. I see the site becoming a true archive of crosswords. I'm working with crossword historian David Steinberg to digitize all the publication's crosswords dating back to 1942. What I find so fascinating about crosswords is how they reflect the current culture – what people are concerned about, happy with, thinking about. When you look at crossword puzzles after WWII, you'll see all kinds of references that today we would deem jingoistic or even racist. As I see it, crossword puzzles are worth preserving as a piece of our cultural heritage.

I know now that if a lot of people get interested and the site takes off, it's easy to spin up more capacity and manage load with my cloud based system. It's good to know that should demand increase, Everleap is capable. Overall I'm very satisfied and happy to put my stamp of approval on your services ■

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