

# Host Your SAP Systems in a Fast-Performing, Highly Available, Nondisruptive, Managed Environment

As SAP Customers Are Compelled to Move to SAP S/4HANA, Secure-24 | NTT  
Offers a Customer-Centric, Outcome-Based Approach to Outsourcing



by **Lauren Bonneau**, Senior Editor, SAPinsider

For companies running SAP software, [SAP's announcement](#) that it is extending the end-of-mainstream-maintenance deadline from 2025 to 2027 means that organizations now have another two years to decide if and when to migrate to SAP S/4HANA. This extension also affects the maintenance plans for the latest releases of SAP ERP, SAP Customer Relationship Management, SAP Supply Chain Management, SAP Supplier Relationship Management, and SAP Business Suite powered by SAP HANA applications. While the extra time might help some C-level executives breathe a little easier, it doesn't change the fact that a choice will need to be made. Companies still need to decide whether to build an upgrade plan into their roadmap, whether to delay plans a little longer to wait for other use cases to develop, and whether to review options for third-party support.

One SAP partner that provisions managed cloud services, IT operations, and applications hosting to help organizations accomplish their business goals is [Secure-24 | NTT](#). With more than 1,000 employees distributed between a headquarters in Southfield, Michigan, and an operations hub in Hyderabad, India, Secure-24 | NTT has managed more than 200 SAP customers and thousands of SAP instances for global organizations in all industries since its founding in 2001. After being acquired by [NTT Com](#) in April 2018, Secure-24 | NTT acquired [Symmetry](#) (in October 2019), which expanded the scale of SAP managed services capabilities and offerings it could provide its clients. It currently offers these managed services capabilities, which include the [ControlPanelGRC](#) software suite, on the [Pure Storage](#) storage platform.

Conversations about SAP S/4HANA migrations have been constant among SAP shops over the last several years, according to [Len Landale](#), Senior Vice President of ERP Applications at Secure-24 | NTT. "SAP's decision to extend the deadline has given some customers a reprieve, but I don't believe

it fundamentally changed the course that a customer was already on," he says. He describes seeing customers in a few camps:

- Those that are committed to SAP software, see the value in going to the newest version, and have a plan in place
- Those that are taking the wait-and-see approach where they have invested in SAP software, plan to maintain their current environment and see how things play out, and will only move if there is an incentive, such as new functionality that is required to run their business
- Those that are using the migration opportunistically depending on their business catalysts, such as mergers and acquisitions, where SAP shops are cutting their teeth on net-new installs of SAP S/4HANA for new business units or sets of plants before moving over the rest of the business

What Secure-24 | NTT is seeing in the market, according to Landale, is that many customers are in the second camp, where they feel all their business functionality needs are currently met, and they haven't been incentivized yet to invest in moving to SAP S/4HANA. "There hasn't been a huge wave of adoption yet, and the move to extend the support deadline probably further reduced the curve a bit," he says. "From an SAP supportability perspective, customers will take their time to get there and will begin to approach adopting SAP S/4HANA in those three scenarios in different ways. It's not a one-size-fits-all situation."

Whatever the case may be, if customers want to stick with SAP software, they must eventually make the move. The project can be a major one to undertake, and there is [much debate](#) about whether it's a migration, an upgrade, or a reimplementation. Regardless of how someone wants to refer to it, the project will require a significant commitment in terms of time and expense. And when companies do decide to invest in the move, they





often simultaneously decide to change their providers or platforms.

“We definitely see that transition to SAP S/4HANA being a compelling event, where SAP customers are looking at more outsourcing as an option, whether that is a public or private cloud,” says [Sean Donaldson](#), Chief Technology Officer at Secure-24 | NTT. “And we see a mix of both private cloud, on-premise type workloads happening as well as public cloud.”

### Why SAP Customers Are Looking for Secure Hosted Environments

Secure-24 | NTT provides managed services around patching, security, and governance of high-performance environments; offers a scalable platform that is application-agnostic; and provides further application-management services in several areas. While Secure-24 hosts a variety of applications, databases, and middleware, from an applications and services practice, SAP hosting is Secure-24 | NTT’s largest practice.

“Our clients find the application breadth of services incredibly important because, even

for those companies that solely run SAP systems, we see many of them with strategies that involve acquiring or merging with organizations that run other non-SAP applications,” says Donaldson. “The ability to manage those systems as they go through that life cycle of integrating those applications into their SAP central instance brings a lot of value to our clients and a better capability to serve the various needs they have.”

What differentiates Secure-24 | NTT from others in the industry is its specialized focus on running mission-critical applications with a high degree of attention to security, compliance, and governance. “Everything that we design and deploy is built with a certain degree of security with audit, compliance, and controls integrated into the platform,” says Donaldson. “And we’ve seen the mentality around patching very aggressively change to follow more of the traditional corporate guidance around monthly patching or even more aggressively, depending on when vulnerabilities happen. There’s an awareness — and balancing between the business and security requirements — where organizations are starting to take security a lot more seriously.”

Over the past few years, Landale has seen security becoming much more important to SAP customers. For example, request for proposals (RFPs) that previously had just a couple checkboxes about security, or maybe a half page of security questions at most, now have over 10 pages devoted to language about security and governance. “A lot of clients looking for a provider are extensively incorporating those types of requirements into their evaluation now,” he says. “Three years ago, it wouldn’t have been much of a conversation. They would have asked about some firewalls and maybe checked the box on encryption. But that was then.”

The security landscape is constantly evolving, and finding a provider that can keep up with emerging threats is critical, especially in the SAP space, according to Landale. “When clients entrust us to run their ERP systems, they inherently get a lot of components of security and elements of a secure environment incorporated automatically, and we’ve found that has mitigated a lot of risk for them,” he says. “We are seeing piqued interest beyond hardening infrastructure to extend security to ensuring environments are protected against risk that exists in the business.

In response, we have a product for SAP environments, ControlPanelGRC, which automates audit and compliance remediation for clients. And we put a strong focus on collaborative security postures with each client’s security teams, having shared visibility so we are all looking at the same pane of glass.”

Secure-24 | NTT offerings are built around a mindset of an outcome-based approach, and engagements with SAP clients from very early on have been sold based on application-based service-level agreements (SLAs), according to Donaldson. “Server-based and network-based SLAs are great, but at the end of the day, it’s ultimately about the end-user experience, the business experience, and the outcomes we can drive with that particular solution,” he says. “We’ve always taken that client-centric approach as well as an outcome-based approach to the services we provide. On the back end, the types of offerings we provide clients are built around the concept of truly holistic and complete solutions. When clients procure an environment from Secure-24 | NTT, everything — from disaster recovery to backups, change control, governance, all the various security components, availability, and performance — is baked in our solution from day one.”

In addition, Secure-24 | NTT built a model for its applications practice that extended to its infrastructure and support teams around the technical landscape ownership and engagement with the client. “We try to be an extension of our clients’ teams,” says Landale. “We want to bring scale to the table, but also match that white-glove service, and striking a balance between those is critical both for our clients and our employees.”

A key factor in creating mutually successful engagements for Secure-24 | NTT clients was the decision to utilize the Pure Storage platform.

### The Advantages of Flash-Based Storage

When clients choose Secure-24 | NTT to host their SAP environment, they are automatically receiving the advantages of flash storage out of the gate due to Pure Storage’s flash-based storage for data centers — which uses consumer-grade solid-state drives that are much faster than traditional disk storage — running on a [FlashStack converged infrastructure](#) from Pure and Cisco. In addition to developing its own flash storage hardware, Pure develops proprietary de-duplication and compression software to improve the amount of data that can be stored on each drive. Pure’s [FlashArray](#) enables organizations to start small and grow as needed with high-performance, scalable data storage.

Similar to others in its industry, Secure-24 | NTT had used various storage vendors through the years and had very big and expensive enterprise-class storage frames made up of lots of spinning hard drives, according to Donaldson. “About five years ago, we evaluated different vendors in this emerging trend of flash storage, and we ended up choosing Pure,” he says. “After implementing Pure in a few pilot scenarios, we observed what we consider the largest meaningful impact on how a business operates that we’ve ever seen from an infrastructure component.”

Pure has three primary products that all use an operating system (OS) called “Purity”:

- FlashArray//C — an all-flash, capacity-optimized, non-volatile memory express (NVMe) storage array that delivers consistent performance, hyper-consolidation, and simplified management for Tier 2 applications at hybrid economics
- FlashArray//X — a third-generation, all-flash, NVMe storage solution that delivers a modern data experience for Tier 0 and Tier 1 workloads
- FlashBlade — a solution for consolidating complex data silos of unstructured data to optimize infrastructures

Upon successful results from the pilot implementations, Secure-24 | NTT spent the next four to five years going through the process of truly standardizing on Pure, according to Donaldson, and hasn’t looked back. “Pure has simplified our life and got us to a place where we can focus more on our clients’ business and applications,” he says. “The conversations around underlying problems that historically came up with clients running large ERP applications — such as concerns around their platform, storage, or long-running applications and reports



— are effectively no longer an issue, and it's truly made a meaningful impact on both our clients and our ability to operationally manage those clients.”

Landale says that the ease of use of the software platform and the Purity OS is one of the big differentiators for Pure. “We are running SAP S/4HANA for clients both on our private cloud, supported by the Pure platform, as well as clients in a public cloud,” he says. “From a security perspective, one aspect that is great about Pure is that the encryption is already done for us automatically in the storage array, so there's value that comes out of the box for organizations looking to leverage this technology in their architecture.”

With other storage vendors, capabilities such as enabling encryption and de-duplication are possible, but are complex undertakings and usually incur a performance penalty, according to Donaldson. “Pure is always encrypted, always de-duped, and there's no performance penalty — and it's still as fast or faster than everything else out in the market,” he says. “We continue to see that other all-flash or all-NVMe storage platforms today, in our opinion, just aren't at the same caliber.”

Secure-24 | NTT has many years of experience building environments and running SAP software on them, leveraging technology and incorporating solutions, and ensuring seamless disaster recovery. “Clients looking for a platform to run SAP software on get the advantages of our experience and our platform out of the gate,” says Landale. “We know precisely what is running on top of the platform and manage that capacity at the holistic level, and so, as a result, eliminate any worry about the performance of an environment.”

### How a Pure Environment Helps SAP Customers Run Better

Generally, SAP systems — particularly business warehouse and analytics systems — are strongly linked to performance and the ultimate end-user experience. While any custom code introduced to the system can cause performance problems, any changes made to the infrastructure or platform traditionally had no noticeable or drastic effects on performance for business users. However, after moving

to Pure, users remarked that systems performed much faster, according to Donaldson. “When we started rolling out Pure's capabilities, the impact on how the system operated was night and day,” he says. “One client had a material requirements planning (MRP) report that ran in six hours and was now down to 33 minutes, and we heard stories of clients opening tickets because they didn't think the report finished correctly because it finished so fast.”

While improved performance is certainly a strong benefit to SAP clients, Landale says that the Pure technology also helped change the way the engineering staff works. Previously, engineers spent a lot of time and effort chasing problems. For example, an intermittent issue in an SAP system, such as an application-level error that overwhelmed a traditional storage frame, might have required involving seven different people — including database, OS, storage, and network resources in addition to SAP experts. Today those problems happen a lot less frequently. “A number of those types of bottlenecks, resource constraints, and client-caused problems have gone away,” he says. “That has freed up our resources to focus on our core business of running and managing servers for clients and running their applications. Our clients can then focus on actual business problems and adding value. It flows all the way up the chain that we have removed all of that spinning disk from our environment over the first two or three years of using Pure.”

Freeing up resources also manifested in how all the members of Secure-24 | NTT's storage team were redirected to other areas of the business. “Most organizations historically had a specific storage team, and storage arrays were such big and complex pieces of technology that it almost required a PhD in the individual technology to run it,” says Donaldson. “From an operational efficiency perspective, Pure is such a simple and reliable platform to deploy and manage, and the technology is so easy to use, that it has eliminated our need for a traditional storage team. We just opened those needs and capabilities and that management support into our traditional cloud virtualization team.”

From both a client support and operational efficiency perspective, traditionally, an organization

would buy a storage array, maintain that asset for five years or so, buy a new storage array, and then perform a big migration to move from the old storage array to the new one, according to Donaldson. “That’s a pain and causes impact when a client wants to grow or expand,” he says. “What Pure has allowed us to do — on a number of occasions, as we’ve upgraded from our oldest array five years ago to the very newest array — is upgrade the software and hardware in place, non-disruptively, without affecting any client performance or availability.”

As always, the bottom line is important to organizations, and cost savings is a significant benefit of Pure. With always-on data replication and easy scalability — especially from an SAP HANA memory perspective — by using Pure, Secure-24 | NTT simplifies SAP data management for clients, which makes it less expensive for them and drives a better return on investment.

### All Storage Is Not Equal

According to Donaldson, the performance that Pure delivers is incredibly fast and low-latency, and the software that runs the storage platform is a real differentiator. “You can’t just go on Amazon and buy an SSD drive, and it’s the same,” he says. “It’s a lot of different components — reliable performance, ease of operations, and high availability — that make up a more holistic and comprehensive solution that gives that differentiated value. Pure has helped us grow our business over the last five years and driven a tremendous amount of success with clients.”

Secure-24 | NTT maintains a strong executive relationship with Pure and looks to continue to grow that relationship and stay in lockstep together to deliver new SAP performance and availability capabilities. “We are continuing to work with Pure on better and more efficient ways to manage SAP systems or even a large number of systems in general — to do everything from improving QA refresh automation processes to implementing newer and even faster storage platforms to continuing to enhance the experience for our clients.”

To learn more, visit [www.secure-24.com](http://www.secure-24.com). ■