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Influence our SQL roadmap and ensure it meets your real-life needs

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Abstract

Do you currently use SQL Server Express or Standard Edition to support third-party applications? Discover how moving to Azure SQL Database can reduce costs and administrative overhead.

This session will cover the pros and cons. We'll walk through real demos of ongoing management, and engage in an interactive discussion to help you decide if Azure SQL DB is right for your environment.

This is a practical, no-hype session designed to help DBAs, architects, and decision-makers make informed platform choices.

What You'll Learn

- **Platform Overview** – What Azure SQL DB is and why it solves Express/Standard Edition limitations

- **Capabilities** – Feature comparison, HA, security, patching, performance

- **Operations** – Provisioning, configuration, daily management tasks

- **Costs** – Licensing, infrastructure, and built-in efficiencies

- **Getting Started** – Migration tools, paths, free tier, decision points

Why Are We Even Having This Conversation?

Express Edition Limits

- **10 GB** max database size
- No SQL Agent — no scheduled jobs
- Capped at 1 CPU socket, 4 cores, 1 GB RAM
- No HA, no mirroring, no enterprise features

> 🗒 "We've outgrown Express, but Standard feels like overkill." — Sound familiar?

Standard Edition Challenges

- Heavy licensing: Server + CALs or core-based
- You own everything: patching, backups, HA
- Scaling means hardware procurement cycles
- Disaster recovery requires significant extra investment

> 🗒 "Patching windows, backup management, capacity planning; it feels like to much work"

Why Are We Even Having This Conversation?

Express Edition Limits

- **50 GB** max database size (SQL Server 2025)
- No SQL Agent — no scheduled jobs
- Capped at 1 CPU socket, 4 cores, 1 GB RAM
- No HA, no mirroring, no enterprise features

🗒 "We've outgrown Express, but Standard feels like overkill." — Sound familiar?

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Azure SQL Database

Fully managed relational DBaaS built on the latest stable SQL Server engine. Microsoft handles the infrastructure — you focus on your data.

Single Database
Dedicated, fully isolated resources. The most common starting point for Express/Standard migrations.

Elastic Pool
Shared resources across multiple databases. A cost-saving gem for SaaS and multi-tenant applications.

Managed Instance
Near 100% SQL Server compatibility. Ideal for lift-and-shift when full feature parity matters.

Microsoft manages: patching, backups, HA, and infrastructure.
You manage: schema, queries, security policies, and data.

Microsoft SQL – ground to cloud to Fabric
The next generation AI database platform

Intelligent ground

Intelligent cloud **SQL**

Intelligent Fabric

Develop once deploy anywhere

| SQL Server | SQL on Linux, containers, k8s | SQL Server enabled by Azure Arc | Azure Arc-enabled SQL managed instance | SQL Server on Azure VM | Azure SQL managed instance | Azure SQL database | Fabric SQL database |

T-SQL

Developers | **Engine** | **Tools** | **Copilots** | **AI** | **Fabric**

How Do They Stack Up?

A side-by-side look at where Azure SQL Database outpaces on-prem editions across the capabilities that matter most.

Feature	SQL Server Express	SQL Server Standard	Azure SQL Database
Max DB Size	10 GB	524 GB	**4 TB**
High Availability	❌	Limited	✅ 99.99% SLA
Automated Backups	❌ Manual	❌ Manual	✅ Auto — 35-day PITR
Auto-Patching	❌	❌	✅ Zero downtime
SQL Agent / Jobs	❌	✅	✅ Elastic Jobs
Scaling	Manual / Hardware	Manual / Hardware	✅ On-demand
Geo-Replication	❌	❌	✅ Built-in
Threat Protection	❌	Limited	✅ Microsoft Defender
Cost Model	Free (but ops cost)	License + HW	**Pay-as-you-go**

Demo 1: Provisioning & Configuration

- Deploying an Azure SQL Database

- Selecting service tiers and performance models

- Review security defaults

- Connect with SSMS or Azure Data Studio

What You Get That You Don't Have to Build

Azure SQL Database is like having a DBA working 24/7 on your database — without the overhead.

High Availability

Automated Backups

Security by Default

Automatic Patching

Intelligent Performance

Global Scale

Demo 2: Day-to-Day Management

- Automated backups and point-in-time restore

- Scaling performance up and down

- Monitoring and performance insights

- Patching and maintenance (or lack thereof!)

Understanding the Cost Model

Two Purchasing Models
Service Tiers

- **General Purpose** — the right fit for most workloads
- **Business Critical** — in-memory OLTP, low latency, readable secondary
- **Hyperscale** — up to 100 TB with rapid scaling

Cost Highlights

Serverless
Auto-scales compute, auto-pauses when idle. Pay only for what you use — perfect for dev/test.

Azure Hybrid Benefit
Bring existing SQL Server licenses. Organizations with EA agreements can save **up to 40%**.

Free Tier
32 GB General Purpose database — always free. One DB per subscription, no commitment needed.

Tip: Use the Azure Pricing Calculator to model your specific workload before committing.

DTU Model
Bundled compute + I/O + memory. Simple and predictable — ideal for steady workloads.

vCore Model
Choose CPU cores and memory independently. Supports **Azure Hybrid Benefit** — bring your existing licenses.

Demo 3: Cost & Operational Comparison

- Azure Pricing Calculator

- Cost Management in the Azure Portal

- Operational overhead comparison

How Do You Get There?

Assessment Tools

- **Database Migration Assistant (DMA)** — compatibility check and feature parity report before you move
- **Azure Migrate** — broader workload discovery across your environment

Migration Options

- **BACPAC export/import** — simple, great for smaller Express databases
- **Azure Database Migration Service** — online migration with minimal downtime
- **Transactional replication** — near-zero downtime for large Standard databases

Getting Started Today

- 🆓 **Free tier:** 32 GB General Purpose DB — always free, no credit card required
- 📗 **Microsoft Learn:** Azure SQL Fundamentals Learning Path
- 📖 **Azure SQL Docs:** docs.microsoft.com/azure/azure-sql

"The hardest part of migrating is deciding to start."

Let's Be Honest About the Tradeoffs

Azure SQL Database is not the right tool for every situation. Know your workload — then choose the right fit.

- Air-Gapped / Offline Environments

- Complex Linked Server Dependencies

- CLR, Service Broker, or Agent Jobs

- Strict Data Residency Requirements

- Very Small, Cost-Sensitive Workloads
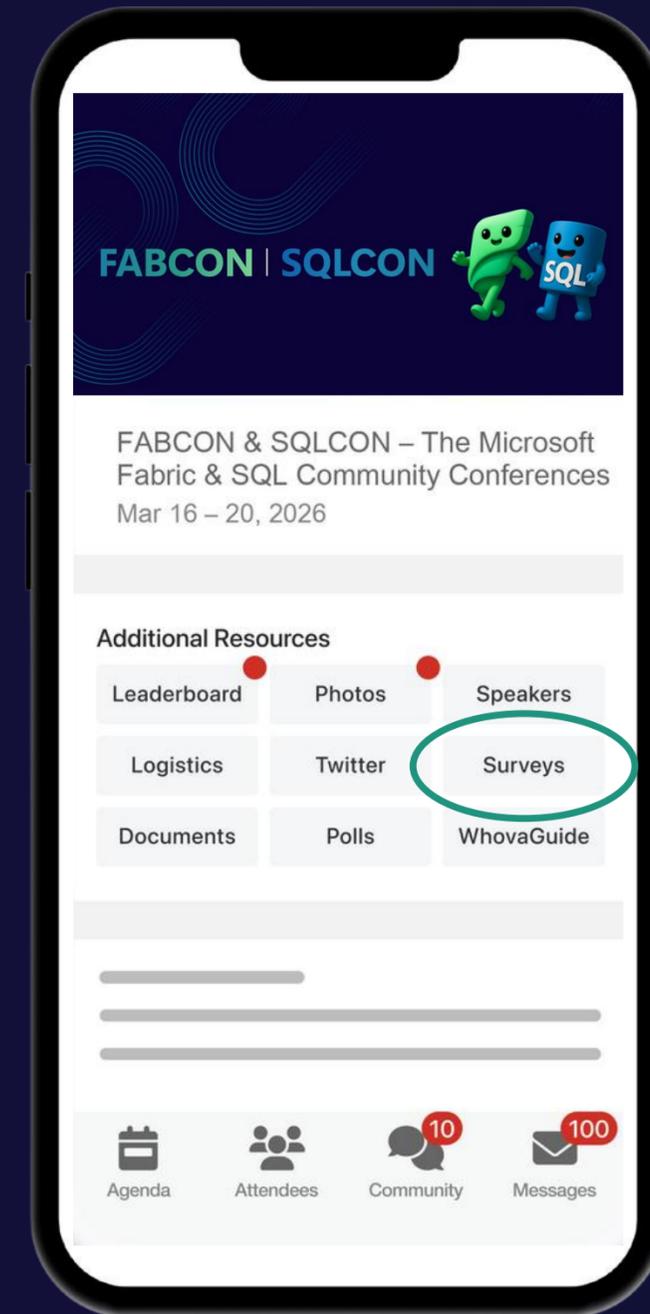
- Legacy 2008/2012 Dependencies

Interactive Discussion

- What database platform are using now?

- Would you consider changing?

- What's stopping you?

Questions

Thank you for Joining us today!

Kelly Broekstra

Warwick Rudd

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