Using the cloud to provide business agility

By Trent Odgers

15 May 2019

Businesses are moving from talking about adopting cloud services to aggressively doing it. While much of this is still reliant on the IT and business decision-making directions of a company, there are those who understand the need and the business benefits in migrating sooner rather than later.

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Many organisations are experiencing pain with their current environment with either performance, scale, or cost management or they have reached the crossroads where the current infrastructure is out of maintenance or needs to be upgraded.

In fact, this is a key factor behind the acceleration of the decision-making process – either invest in the cloud, driven by a more cost-effective pay-per-use model, or spend massive amounts of money purchasing and maintaining new hardware.

Of course, the cloud is not new. Before its current moniker, it was referred to as hosting. In South Africa, there is a myriad of hosting providers that have built up their services offering over the past decade. This has resulted in a good mix between private cloud and managed cloud hosting solutions.

Changing environment

Businesses are embracing the private cloud with 65% of CIOs in the IDC South African CIO Survey stating they intend to invest in public and private cloud this year. Traditionally, this is where a lot of companies have begun the transition.

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Before public cloud, businesses had their own equipment in their office environment - "private cloud". Everything from data centre facilities, to servers, storage, networking, and firewalls that were managed in-house. Because of the reasons mentioned above, moving workloads to pay-per-use is a lot more attractive, but a lot of businesses are still cautious about the security of the cloud, which must be taken into consideration.

These factors are contributing to more of an openness towards a multi-cloud approach where private cloud, managed cloud and public cloud are used to find the right fit for a specific workload. On the one hand, businesses are embracing productivity suites like Microsoft Office 365 on public cloud platforms, while remaining private when it comes to sensitive financial data and relying on their on-premises hardware for specific use cases. This is complemented with Backup-as-a-Service (BaaS), Disaster Recovery-as-a-Service (DRaaS) and Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) hosted at local managed cloud providers.

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Thanks to the recent arrival of Microsoft Azure data centres in South Africa, companies are going to start expecting more services from their cloud providers. Many organisations have been waiting for this launch before beginning their migration. With the anticipated latency and workflow improvements being associated to these local data centres, it is going to be more difficult for businesses to ignore the cloud as a strategic driver for growth.

Furthermore, the Microsoft product stack will also diversify. From Office 365 to Backup-as-a-Service into the cloud, companies will have more options when it comes to value-added solutions. It will also enable businesses to develop new and innovative services to go to market quicker. Ultimately, it is about businesses becoming more agile than ever.

Options abound

These local data centres will also provide customers with more choices. This means local cloud providers will have to adapt or be consumed by public cloud providers. Many of the local cloud providers have started this journey and many of them are already Azure resellers and do not have their own data centres.

These providers will become specialists in the months to come and those local cloud service providers who are still focusing on their IaaS offerings need to adapt quicker to complement their solutions with that of a public cloud provider or see their growth shrink.

Even so, many local providers are still very traditional in their thinking. They are struggling to change their business models to move from Capex opportunities to Opex annuity. However, the current and upcoming multi-national data centres should

be viewed as an opportunity instead of a threat.

Many cloud providers have aligned with public cloud providers and developed practices to complement their offerings. They already have verticals operating inside their business with Microsoft, Amazon Web Services (AWS), or Google practices. Indirectly, if not aligned, these units will compete with one another for the same customer opportunity. This is not ideal for the customer as the businesses tend to focus on meeting the requirements of the division instead of what stakeholders need.

Change inevitable

Despite this, there are new cloud providers who are aggressively migrating new and existing customers to public cloud platforms. These are the ones that will likely specialise in specific service offerings. They are open, willing to change, and provide clients with the options needed for a digitally connected business environment.

Yes, when it comes to the cloud, discussions will always revolve around security and compliance. But with more multi-national data centres to arrive in the country over the coming months, any concerns will be less of a factor. The cloud requires a mindshift change. It is no longer only about hosting but providing organisations with a new and more agile way to do business.

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