Channel has a key role in delivering cloud services, but data remains critical

By Gerhard Fourie   21 Dec 2022

Cloud has undoubtedly become the delivery method of choice for businesses, particularly those in the SMME space, to access enterprise-class technology cost-effectively. Without the 'as a service' model, many of these solutions would simply not be affordable for smaller businesses, especially in South Africa.

Gerhard Fourie, channel lead at Commvault Africa | image supplied

This does not mean, however, that the channel has become irrelevant. Rather, it highlights the role of channel partners in bringing necessary skills, consolidating offerings to deliver comprehensive solutions, and above all prioritising data management to ensure customers continue to have a seamless cloud experience.

A land of opportunity

While theoretically cloud and service-based models can be accessed directly, the reality is that majority of businesses in South Africa do not have the skills, resources and subject matter experts in-house to manage this. The channel, however, does, which makes their role more important than ever. Outsourcing cloud services to a channel partner means that businesses can access enterprise-class technology as well as specialised skills and resources in a much more cost-effective way than ever before.

The cloud does not cut out the middleman, nor does it remove the need for the channel. Rather, it opens new opportunities for channel partners to add value and deliver solutions that make a real positive impact to businesses. For businesses themselves, this allows them to access scarce IT skills and resources alongside the latest evolutions in technology, which in turn enables them to compete on a more global scale.

Solutions, not products

The role of the channel is constantly shifting, and today there is significant opportunity to bring together various Software as a Service (SaaS) with other service-based offerings and skilled resources to deliver complete managed solutions and services. The differentiator here is having the relevant skills to enable them to offer this, which is where vendor partners need to come into play.

Vendors need to work with distributors and resellers to ensure that their channel is effectively skilled to enable them to deliver value-added services and solutions. Resellers also need to ensure that they are not simply completing certifications for the purposes of a piece of paper, but to enable them to add the value their customers need. Channel partners who understand how to leverage cloud services and package them into solutions that are easy for the customer to access, use and understand, are the ones who will be successful.

Don't forget the data

Cloud offers access to technology without the need for an infrastructure budget and there is a huge amount of choice out there. However, the data remains critical. For one thing, with load shedding, network access can be compromised which means that while the data is highly available in the cloud platform, the customer is unable to access it. In addition, while the cloud provider is responsible for ensuring that data is available, it remains the responsibility of the customer to ensure data is protected and managed.

Data management and disaster recovery are offerings that channel partners should always look to include in their basket of solutions, along with other elements like data protection and ransomware protection delivered as a service. The goal should be to deliver to customers a complete solution that integrates various technologies on the back end and offers customers a seamless front-end experience through a single pane of glass.

Tailored solutions are key

Thanks to the cloud, products have become a commodity that anyone can access. Taking the time to understand the customer, assessing the environment, and bringing the relevant solutions together to deliver a strategy to resolve business pain points is the key to competitive differentiation.

However, it is essential to remember that data is the foundation of all that is digital, and it is the most important asset a business has. Solutions should always be built around the data as this is central to a complete offering. Speed and ease of access to data is the core of any cloud-based service offering.

ABOUT GERHARD FOURIE

Gerhard Fourie is a South African who is on a five-year working stint in Japan as the senior manager for brand and communication for global overseas markets at Nissan Motor Company. Fourie's responsibilities cover markets across South America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Before his transfer to Tokyo in January 2008, he was the GM for marketing

and planning at Nissan South Africa. Email him at {{gerhard@mail.nissan.co.jp}}. For more about *Brands & Branding*, go to {{www.brandsandbranding.co.za}} or email {{lynn@brandsandbranding.co.za}}, as well as the Brands & Branding for Good conference website, {{www.brandsandbrandingconference.co.za}}, which will include a major focus on brand relationships with increasingly socially and environmentally 'aware' consumers'.

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