Getting into the IT cloud

By Jan Roux   18 Jan 2010

As we peek over the top of our PC infrastructure and rifle through our laptops, routers, hard drives and external storage devices, we are presented with an opportunity to reflect on just how far information, communication and digital lifestyle technology has come and the extent to which it has influenced business.

Today, because of developments such as software as a service (SaaS), virtualisation, cloud computing, advanced hosted services and much more, businesses of any size or core focus are able to financially sustain operations and compete with larger counterparts.

The combination of ongoing R&D, innovation, strategic investment and demand has resulted in widespread, easier access to technology services. The advent of the online forum as a platform through which to acquire, manage and apply services could be argued to be one of the more significant developments in this sector over the past twelve months.

Economic availability

It is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it means that the technology domain and all it encompasses in terms of solutions, service and support is available at reasonable rates to a broader market place. It is a direct challenge to the dominance the larger enterprise-sized operators have enjoyed on the technology solution development and implementation space.

A market that offers managed technology services, the ability to manage and comply with regulation, reinforce systems, enhance operation and add value to client service via available cloud-based infrastructure will result in a more mature, more competitive and stronger sector.

One of the main issues and obstacles for small-to-medium sized operations in their quest to acquire meaningful technology

and reliable support has been that of cost. The ability to gain control over challenges such as email retention, adequate parameter security, protection of data, maintenance, backups and other technology-driven areas of modern business management has traditionally come at a price.

Decision makers within businesses have always known this and it has been at the forefront of most technology investment strategies. This is still the case - the global recession still forces management at companies to evaluate spend, requirements, options, challenges, risk and advantages seriously. However, with the growth of Internet or virtual managed services, the decision maker at a small-to-medium sized operation has more advantage and a stronger hand to play.

Co-sourcing options

Another significant aspect of this trend is the rapid transformation of the services acquisition or outsourcing business model. Influences like SaaS, virtualisation and Cloud Computing has resulted in a shift from an outsourcing model to a co-sourcing model - a careful blend of the benefits of in-house control, knowledge and values with the expertise, skills and market knowledge of credible service providers.

The change in business model has also widened the net of opportunity for the smaller players in the market. A co-source scenario can work very well, if all the dynamics are readily in order and everyone is aware of what the common objectives are. It does not require a substantial capital outlay and available resources are used strategically. However, success in co-sourcing is very much dependent on- and influenced by requirements, risks, level of readiness as well as the availability of in-house skilled personnel.

Outsourcing

Many operators hoping to engage a broader market and expand their reach would rather leave the core responsibilities of ICT infrastructure management to those with proven track records and expertise. To them, the option to outsource fully remains ultimately more cost effective route, with less risk and more return on investment.

Essentially, the credibility and efficiency that marks the established SaaS and Cloud-based channels of ICT services distribution and adoption has catapulted operators of virtually any size and focus into a new era of business management. At a time when human resource development, skills acquisition and application, and strategic technology investment and support clearly define the commercial landscape, the online medium and level of use has emerged as the primary differentiator today.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jan Roux is MD of the Integr8 Group, an established provider of managed information, communication and telecommunication services.

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