Businesses can be more competitive with cloud computing

The role of information technology (IT) in the enterprise is changing from being a supplier of devices to becoming a supplier of pooled computing resources, with cloud computing giving IT professionals an opportunity to increase their strategic value to their businesses.

That's the word from Microsoft's global virtualisation director, Edwin Yuen, who will be in South Africa for a series of Microsoft Management Summit (MMS) events this month. The events, in Durban on 22 May and Johannesburg on 24 and 25 May, are expected to draw several hundred IT professionals from some of the country's biggest companies.

"Cloud computing enables you to deploy continuous services that are always on, always available, and delivered, down to a set of connected devices," says Yuen. "South African IT professionals should be looking at ways of evolving their roles with cloud computing to help their businesses be more competitive." He believes that management systems make the difference for customers embarking on cloud computing journeys.

Self-provision is one of four characteristics

At MMS, Microsoft will be previewing its System Center 2012, which is now generally available as a reorganised systems management system with separate provider and consumer management consoles. The addition of a consumer console allows a company's employees to provision themselves with virtual machines. Allowing end users to self-provision is one of four distinguishing characteristics of how private cloud computing is different from simply establishing banks of virtualised servers in the data centre, says Yuen.

In addition to self-service, he offers three tests of the success of a cloud model: Do think about your resources (servers, storage, networking) in a pooled fashion rather than as individual entities? Can you provide elasticity in services and applications, so that they can expand with demand and contract when it goes away? Can you track usage so that you can show back or charge back to users, or user departments, the compute power they are using?

"If you can answer yes to those four questions, then you're in a cloud computing model," says Yuen.