

# Choosing the right cloud solution with additional benefits to boost business

 By Pippa Wilson

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While the cloud remains a hot topic for business, the majority of discussions has now moved beyond the debate over whether or not it will serve the business and deliver benefits such as cost efficiency and agility. These advantages are now a given. However, businesses are still faced with a challenge - the dilemma of deciding whom to partner with in terms of a cloud service provider.

## Cloud as a viable option

There are many players in the local market jostling for space, each offering similar services and solutions. For the customer, this is beneficial as differentiation means providers need to deliver additional value in order to heighten competitiveness and avoid a price war. However, it can be confusing when customers are faced with too much choice. Choosing the right service provider with the most appropriate benefits and value adds for your business is essential to leveraging maximum cloud advantage.



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As the cloud has become an increasingly viable option in the local market, many organisations have become convinced of its value proposition. Of the ICT market as a whole, cloud is one of the fastest growing sectors worldwide. Many cloud services, particularly Infrastructure as a Service, are largely commodity-based, with prices becoming a race to zero. This means that when it comes to purchasing a cloud service, there are lots of providers to choose from at competitive price points. However, organisations need to select the service provider that will deliver the best fit for their business. This may not always be the cheapest offering.

## What to consider when choosing a provider

The booming, competitive cloud market has given rise to many small providers focusing on a very specific service. This has both pros and cons. On the one hand, there are usually cost savings that can be leveraged when compared to larger providers. In addition, smaller providers are usually specialists in what they do and often, very few companies can do it better. However, on the other hand, their scope is limited, meaning that when it comes to customers needing a portfolio of cloud services, the customer has to manage multiple providers rather than just one or two, and inherit the hassle of integrating these services. This is not a viable option for the SMB.

In order to ensure maximum value and returns, it often benefits organisations to look for a provider that has both specialist skills in the services they offer as well as a broader range of offerings which are syndicated from other providers. This will help to ensure interoperability does not become a problem when purchasing multiple cloud services. In addition, in order to avoid a price war, many providers are now focusing on offering value around their services through bundling.

This is not limited to complementary services. It can include professional services and consulting to ensure customers choose the right service to meet their needs and derive maximum advantage from the service after installation or activation. This is a huge benefit that is often overlooked until an organisation ends up stuck with a cloud service that does not meet their needs.

## Self-management and self-provisioning

Self-management and self-provisioning are two important criteria that organisations should look for, and can be particularly

beneficial for the SMB market. These features enable organisations to manage their service without having to request additions, changes or deletions from their provider. This reduces the time it takes to provision new services and greatly increases agility and customer experience. If a business hires a new employee they can simply log on to their control panel, create a new user and provision access to all the services they need, for example, a new mailbox or anti-virus subscription. Organisations can easily scale up and down dynamically to suit their requirements.

As with any new technology or service, training is an essential component to ensuring maximum value and adoption. Training is often overlooked or added as an afterthought, which can hinder adoption and diminish cloud benefits. If providers expect self-service to be a success, they need to provide the right training and customers should look for a cloud provider that puts a lot of focus on training. Successful providers are putting as much effort into customer training as any other aspect of the service.

Providers with a cloud customer portal can make self-help videos available so customers can refer to them whenever they need to, making life easier for the customer and reducing the number of service calls to the provider. Integration and migration capabilities are also key, since cloud solutions that are core to the business are hardly ever standalone solutions, and must work with existing business systems.

When it comes to selecting the right cloud services, organisations need to ensure business requirements are clear and they have the right partner to meet their needs. The cloud market in South Africa continues to grow, and this rate will only increase as the market matures, with new players entering the market and existing players exiting or consolidating. Organisations thus need to examine their business needs and the services and value adds on offer, as well as the record and reputation of the cloud provider, in order to ensure they select the most appropriate services and provider.

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