

TRENDS ARTICLE**EMBRACING THE TRUE VALUE OF CLOUD**

By Graham Beneke, technical pre-sales specialist at Datacentrix and Chairman of the Internet Service Providers' Association (ISPA)

The great migration is finally starting to happen. Beginning with early adopters a few years ago, the stampede is gathering momentum, and is certain to continue growing over the coming months and years.

I'm talking, of course, about South African companies' migration to cloud-based enterprise technology, says Graham Beneke, technical pre-sales specialist at Datacentrix and Chairman of the Internet Service Providers' Association (ISPA).

But, while many organisations are shifting vast swathes of their IT estate to hosted environments, in many cases, the thinking isn't stretching beyond merely rehousing assets in a new location.

Yes, organisations are gaining some immediate cost benefit by avoiding costly capex-based IT investments and moving towards smoother monthly opex models, but very few are capitalising on the true power of the cloud. Many are not taking advantage of the business dynamism that can be achieved by flexibly provisioning services, or processing capacity, as and when they are required.

Consider that cloud computing embodies the original founding principles of the Internet, at an enterprise level. In other words, it's available whenever you need it, it grows and shrinks as you require, it opens up new ideas and opportunities, and it allows you to connect with others in interesting ways.

However, local organisations seem to be missing some of these tricks, as many resolutely apply traditional principles of business and technology management to an entirely new, cloud-based, paradigm. The discussion has not yet evolved to areas like new-found business agility, more flexible collaboration, enhanced customer experiences, and new business models.

So, what will it take to make the leap of faith into "true cloud migration"?

Firstly, we have to overcome our resistance to the unknown. The relationship between IT and business has historically been characterised by lengthy lead times, multiple approvals, policies, governance standards, budgeting frameworks, and so on.

Today, IT needs to "move at the speed of business", responding to business or customer needs, and provision new services on a rapid, continual basis. This could mean abandoning many of the frameworks in which we've previously found comfort, and embracing new approaches. IT teams need to get in front of the changing dynamics by remodelling their engagements with businesses.

Secondly, we need to relinquish our need to be "in control" of everything within the IT estate.

Traditionally, organisations may have had higher levels of control with purely on-premises infrastructure sourced through the central channel of group IT. The consequence of this, though, is that we shut ourselves off from the latest advancements in cloud architectures, software as a service, and other tools that can be instantly brought into the organisation. Ultimately, the company will struggle to maintain pace with its faster-moving competitors.

And finally, we need to embrace our creative spirits – and ask the kinds of questions that could lead to true cloud benefit realisation: how could we dynamically scale resources to power a new digital marketing campaign? How could we tap into a new cloud platform to incubate a new innovation? How could we use application programme interfaces (APIs) to extend aspects of our cloud-based environment to build new partnerships with suppliers, partners, customers, or others in our business ecosystem?

Cloud computing stands out as one of the most pivotal advancements in enterprise IT over the past few years. And, as the technology has surged forward and become broadly available to companies large and small, it's now time for our thinking to catch up – to truly capitalise on the real value of the cloud.

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