Building a stairway to the cloud

By Saurabh Kumar

For many South African firms, making the giant leap to a fully-hosted, fully-outsourced cloud environment is still a daunting idea. Compared with their peers in the US or Europe, local organisations are subject to generally poorer connectivity, longer asset renewal cycles, pressurised budgets, and greater risk aversion when it comes to issues like data sovereignty and privacy. All these factors combine to stifle the widespread adoption of Cloud services.

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However, Remote Infrastructure Management (RIM), helps to bridge the leap from traditional, on-site, and self-managed infrastructure; to the ultimate vision of Cloud architecture.

Also known as "asset light outsourcing", RIM means that organisations give outsourced service providers access to remotely manage and monitor their infrastructure. Most commonly, the aspects of the IT estate that are remotely administered are network devices, data centre elements such as servers, storage, databases, applications, IT security devices, end user computing, mobile devices and help desk.

RIM aims to alleviate the day-to-day pressures of maintaining uptime on key infrastructure - seen as a 'low value' but essential activity in the eyes of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) - and helps organisations gain advantages from more agile and optimised infrastructure management.

Advantages of RIM

In today's dynamic business landscape, the ability to outsource basic IT functions means that the CIO and his team can focus on more strategic aspects of their portfolio. Some of the other major advantages of RIM include:

- Real-time visibility (via dashboards) of the organisation's entire IT estate

Irrespective of the type of legacy systems being used, key health signals from the various IT components are consolidated into a unified view.

- Policies and governance to prepare for the ultimate migration to the Cloud

As the organisation embarks on its journey to RIM, it starts to establish the internal governance standards that will form the basis of its ultimate destination - the Cloud.

- Increased focus on innovation

As basic activities are handed over to a RIM provider, the focus of the IT department is elevated, to become more about innovation and business transformation.

- Ensuring the availability of all skill sets

The beauty of the RIM model is that you get always-on access to global specialists in every technology domain. The organisation no longer has to worry about equipping its IT team with an expert in every legacy system, every component, and every facet of the IT estate.

- Uptime commitments and business level agreements

The right RIM provider will contractually commit to very stringent performance agreements - such as maintaining 99.99% uptime. We are now also seeing an evolution from traditional Service Level Agreements (SLAs), to 'Business Level Agreements', which share responsibility for key business metrics with the RIM provider.

- Alignment with global best practices and standards

RIM providers ensure that international standards such as ITIL, a broadly accepted approach to IT Service Management (ITSM), are embedded within the organisation. This helps to reduce risk, improve efficiencies, and create a sustainable platform for an evolving and growing IT estate in the future.

Taking an asset-light, RIM approach gives firms the opportunity to build trusted relationships with service providers, and start thinking strategically about a phased approach to Cloud architecture.

It may be that some applications remain fully-owned i.e. not shipped into a Cloud environment, however, RIM assists organisations to distinguish between the two. Ultimately, the shift to the Cloud is never '100%'. The reality is that IT estates are complex and heterogeneous, with some assets hosted in public clouds, some in private clouds, and some on-premise. The important thing is to end up with the most efficient layout possible, which is aligned with business needs, and managed in a unified manner.

Having the right RIM provider makes this possible while also giving the organisation access to a consulting partner that guides the organisation on emerging technology trends in general.

No matter what the organisation's primary reason for outsourcing is - cost saving, transformation, efficiency, visibility, optimisation, etc. - using the model of RIM can help to produce a 'step-change' in the organisation's evolution.

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