Why we cannot ignore the benefits of cloud-based training apps

By Matthew Barker

13 Jun 2018

Despite the fact that Africa's e-learning market doubled from 2011 to 2016, reaching $513 million, the continent's three biggest economies, South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya, are not yet moving their training applications to the cloud en masse.



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This was one of the key findings from Cloud Africa 2018, a research project conducted by World Wide Worx and F5 Networks, across Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa earlier this year, where we asked decision-makers at 300 medium and large organisations about their cloud computing usage, benefits, and intentions.

Lagging behind

While all markets were on par in terms of their use of business apps in the cloud, and while organisations in Kenya and Nigeria were more likely to host service apps in the cloud than those in South Africa, it was interesting to note that training and legal apps were the lowest on the priority list when it came to cloud-hosted applications, across all markets.

The global e-learning market is expected to be worth $200 billion by 2024, driven by emerging corporate trends and the escalating popularity of online or internet-based learning programs.

Yet, only 14% of South African organisations said they hosted training apps in the cloud, dropping to just 2% of organisations in both Kenya and Nigeria.

Democratising knowledge

The cloud is the ideal platform to make education more accessible to more people, especially in Africa, where inequality and a lack of access to infrastructure, connectivity, and locally relevant content have resulted in a largely uneducated and under-skilled workforce.

At the foundational phase, online learning allows children in rural areas to access the same quality content, delivered by highly qualified educators, as children in more developed urban areas. It democratises education, providing knowledge transfer and equal opportunities for all.

Extended to the university level, e-learning not only opens new revenue streams for universities but also solves the problem of overcrowding and not being able to meet the demand. The result is that more students can register for courses, resulting in more employable graduates and, hopefully, reduced unemployment rates.

Universities are often criticised for not evolving their outdated curriculums in line with industry trends and requirements, and therefore producing graduates who are not adequately prepared for the world of work. Cloud-based training apps can be adapted on the fly, giving universities the edge by allowing them to provide the most relevant, up-to-date course material.

In education, as in industry and business, change is the only constant. Education cannot end at school or university. It must be a lifelong commitment for any professional, especially in today's rapidly changing business environment. Cloud computing is the only solution if enterprises want to keep up with the change.

Educating the enterprise

IT and business are always changing - and while the requirement for apps to be fast, highly available and secure won't ever change - what has changed is the speed of deployment. Users and customers want everything delivered immediately, a dynamic that's driving the DevOps methodology and automation.

Businesses that want to keep up with the pace of their customers need to empower their teams with the skills and expertise to respond to change in new ways. Often, this means bypassing traditional, task-based operations, which are painfully slow and can't keep up with business requirements and user demands.

Cloud computing and training apps offer an opportunity to upskill professionals in any industry. F5's Super-NetOps training programme is a perfect example. Designed to teach network professionals the foundational skills required to effectively automate their infrastructure – for free – our goal is to help the industry adapt to change, through education, so that it can continue to improve the user experience and drive new functionality.

Advantages

Facilitating learning through cloud-based training apps is better suited to millennials and Generation Z, who want to consume content on the go. Just as everything else is evolving to cater to our shortening attention spans, so too must education. Training apps allow schools, universities, and enterprises to offer more dynamic education material, including video and gamification, that brings the material to life and allows users to learn at their own pace.

Their business advantages cannot be denied. Online training helps teams to stay on top of their changing job requirements and, therefore, improves job satisfaction and loyalty. It aids succession planning by equipping individuals with the

knowledge and skills needed to progress in their careers. It helps businesses keep control of training budgets and reduces costs associated with recruitment and onboarding. In addition, it helps businesses to stay relevant and competitive by empowering teams to experiment and innovate as identified by all three markets in our research for being the biggest business impact of cloud computing.

We can no longer be selfish with the learning experience. We need as many skilled and knowledgeable professionals as possible to help us all survive the future of work and the onslaught of machine learning, artificial intelligence and the internet of everything.

Businesses in Africa need to start shifting their priorities and to share their knowledge and expertise so that we can all become more agile and comfortable with change.

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