The future of the cloud is the future of business

By Peter Reid

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The evolution of cloud-based technology has dramatically changed the business landscape in the past few years, and the latest developments in technology are set to create even further disruption. Businesses today are faced with increasing pressure not only from their traditional competition, but also from consumers as well as small startup businesses, who are empowered by the technological revolution. Agility and innovation is key to survival and profitability in this changing world. Embracing cloud-based technology is essential to this.

At the heart of innovation

Peter Reid

The world we live in has transformed significantly in the last 10 - 15 years. Smart technology such as smartphones and tablets has enabled always-on connectivity, and apps are continuing to evolve and change the way consumers interact and organisations do business. Apps have also led to the evolution of entirely new business models and ways of completing tasks, and the growth of wearable technologies such as smart watches, and virtual reality glasses, is set to further extend this capability in ways that can only be imagined. These, and several other emerging trends, have changed the game completely.

At the heart of all of these 'game changers' lies the cloud. Without connectivity to some form of cloud, smart technologies would not exist. However, therein lies the challenge. While the cloud enables a vast amount of technological innovation and does not in itself introduce any new technical problems, it still has the potential to cause issues for business. The different commercial arrangements, including public, private and hybrid cloud, can exacerbate old technical problems, and interoperability is a crucial requirement. As a result, another trend that is emerging is a more open way of creating technology solutions, to allow for this required level of interfacing and interoperability.

The rise of IoT

In addition, the growth of the Internet of Things (IoT) is bringing about the emergence of mesh networks, low-cost sensors and chips, modular technologies, and high levels of standardisation. The potential for the IoT is vast, and encompasses everything from supermarket trolleys to home automation systems.

As sensors become smaller and more cost effective, and connectivity even more ubiquitous, so more and more everyday items will become connected to the vast network of the IoT. Further to this, 3D printing is increasingly cost effective, changing the prototyping process from a long and laborious one to a quick and agile one where designs can be altered on the fly.

Revolutionising business

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So what does all of this mean for business? In short, a complete revolution of the business environment. Connected devices enable the 'no office' to become a reality. Employees can be located and work from anywhere in the world, with access to the same corporate resources, enabled by the cloud. Augmented reality could even allow organisations to create virtual meetings where everyone is 'present' at any given location.

Even hard drives are becoming increasingly unnecessary as cloud storage offers capacity, convenience and anywhere access from any device. The traditional bricks and mortar office

could become a legacy that is no longer necessary in the business world of the future. New ways of working will emerge that cannot even be imagined yet - much the same way as today's world was unimaginable just a few decades ago.

Low-cost processing and the growth of artificial intelligence and machine learning have vast potential to change businesses, again in ways that cannot yet be imagined. Crowdfunding means that startup businesses could pose serious competition without ever needing to go through traditional means for funding. With 3D printing, factories are no longer essential for manufacturing - in fact, someone could print and build new and innovative solutions from their garage and ship them to consumers anywhere in the world.

For business, the upshot is that competition is no longer just other business, but potentially any consumer as well. With technological innovation, all a consumer needs is an idea, and utilising these new tools, the idea can quickly be made a reality. The pool of competitors will thus increase exponentially, challenging organisations to remain relevant and profitable. Agility is key to survival, and cloud is key to enabling this agility. Organisations need to embrace the cloud or risk falling behind and losing out to the growing list of their more innovative competitors.

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