

How to optimise your cloud usage

 By [Elaine Wang](#)

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For the longest time, businesses have been involved in discussions around the benefits of shifting their data and applications to the cloud. But, it's increasingly apparent that the time for those conversations is over.

According to the Cloud Africa 2018 report, usage of the cloud among medium and large organisations in Africa has more than doubled from fewer than 50% in 2013 to pervasive use in 2018.



Elaine Wang, Cloud and Software Solutions Director at Rectron

Findings from the report were clear – the conversation is no longer about whether to use the cloud, but rather how businesses are gaining benefits from the cloud. But, though the benefits of cloud are now widely recognised, they are still not prioritised.

It begs the question – how can companies start to prioritise, and therefore, optimise their cloud usage?

Here are some helpful tips for businesses looking to maximise their return on investment from the cloud.

Set the right goals

A solid cloud strategy begins with an understanding of the core business goals that need to be achieved. The company is then able to consider the tools it can leverage to achieve these goals.

Broadly speaking, the conversation on business goals needs to take into consideration a number of different objectives, including: how to maximise operational productivity; how to engage with and delight customers, as well as how to minimise downtime. All of this is underpinned by an expectation that business environments need to operate securely and in a manner that is compliant.

Once these goals are identified, the business can start engaging with consultants that can advise on a variety of tools to achieve these goals, assisting them to set short, medium, and long-term plans. At this point, businesses should also weigh up the benefits of using cloud applications versus traditional on-premise hosting.

Understanding what cloud means to your business is really important. A recent study shows that businesses that are easily able to articulate the value of cloud to their companies see a higher return of investment from the cloud. In fact, these businesses typically see a 51% increase in top-line revenue originating from the cloud.

Introduce accountability

Once you have the right goals in place, appoint someone to be responsible for your cloud strategy. Ideally this should be someone who not only has a firm handle on technology, but also someone who has a deep understanding of your business.

This individual can then monitor the business' progress, mapping it against your original cloud goals. Never underestimate the importance of keeping your business accountable to its original objectives.

Thereafter, identify the individuals responsible for the technical delivery. This typically involves someone from the IT department in the organisation, but should also include external service providers.

Data residency considerations

With local legislation such as the Protection of Personal Information Act dictating how data should be managed and stored within an organisation, many businesses do not feel comfortable storing their business outside of South Africa. As such, considerations around where the data is stored will have an impact on the solution the business ultimately chooses to implement.

Consider cloud-native applications

At a basic level cloud services can be broken down into two basic functions, storage and compute. To make sure that your company can benefit from compute as well as storage, your applications should be cloud-native – this refers to how the applications are created and deployed rather than where they are stored.

Through Microsoft Azure, for example, cloud native applications can be built from the ground up – ultimately optimising them for cloud scale and performance.

And when you store your data in a cloud-native format, you open up your business to a whole host of benefits, including Data Recovery and analytics.

It's also worth noting that if your business makes use of modern cloud-based applications, they can communicate with one another. This means that your businesses can have key applications talk to one another in order to generate valuable insights and develop better products and services for your customers.

Calculate the cost of downtime

Another important question revolves around the level of security your business requires.

It's critical to ask yourself how much down time would be acceptable for a particular application. Once you establish the cost to your business of that downtime, you will then have a clearer idea of how much to invest in making the application highly available.

In addition to the uptime guarantees that reputable cloud vendors offer, one also needs to consider the obvious – what happens if the physical infrastructure at the office fails? Think, for example, of the increasing possibility of power cuts and loss of Internet connectivity.

Cloud providers like Microsoft offer a range of different security controls, and it's also useful to know that opting for a Disaster Recovery Plan can help make your information even more secure. Should the worst happen all your data will be safely backed up.

Consolidation of tools

It can be difficult to navigate the plethora of tools available in the market and businesses need to consider how the options they select will be used and managed within the organisation.

From a user perspective, it might make more sense to log onto one central portal, using single sign-on rather than having to log in to multiple different portals. From an administrative point of view, it may also be easier to manage tools when they are consolidated from a central portal that monitors all services, rather than having to maintain multiple disparate systems.

Finally, businesses should also determine the types of files their organisation needs to store, accurately assessing each of these items' storage requirements. In this way they can ensure the capacity they purchase directly correlates to the organisation's needs, ultimately helping the business to avoid unnecessary costs.

By walking through a few of these basics principles, your business can genuinely start to optimise its cloud usage.

This ultimately will lead to greater returns for your company and a solid platform from which you can continue introducing innovation to your business.

ABOUT ELAINE WANG

I am a driven and extremely hard working individual, with a keen eye for business ideas and opportunities.

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